

MY LADY'S BARGAIN

ELIZABETH HOPE





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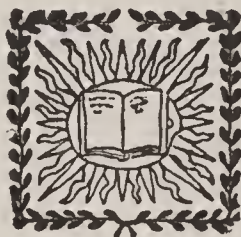
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BY
ELIZABETH HOPE



NEW YORK AND LONDON
THE CENTURY CO.

1923

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MY LADY'S BARGAIN

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CHAPTER I

A BLOW AND A KISS

HIS Highness looked up as I entered.
“That you, Williams? Good. I sent for you in order to inform you that Lady Killigew agrees to the bargain, so there need be no delay in your marriage. The sooner the knot is tied the better, I think. My wedding gift to the lady shall be a pardon for her young brother and a passport for the same overseas; but I do not deliver these until the Lady Killigew has become Lady Rosamond Williams, and her estates safely in your honest keeping, General.”

I saluted with all due deference, and it seemed as if the interview was terminated, for Cromwell turned back to some papers he had been examining at my entry; however, I knew my man, and waited patiently for his next step, whatever it might be. It came almost immediately. Lifting his eyes swiftly from the papers before him, he swept my face with his searching gaze.

"I understand that Lady Killigew is a very beautiful woman, though I have never personally met her. I think you come from Surrey yourself, General Williams; perhaps you are already intimately acquainted with the lady of your choice?"

I am naturally slow of speech, as possibly the majority of big men are, and this deliberation has stood me in good stead time and again.

On this occasion my habitual manner of pausing before answering a question gave me the opportunity I needed to consider what facts I had better disclose and what I could safely keep back in my reply.

Had I been dealing with a less subtle man I might have been tempted to try a lie direct, or possibly an admixture of truth and falsehood; and, had I done so, Oliver, in all probability, would not have thought any the worse of me, for his Highness was by no means particular as to truthfulness himself; but the trouble would come later, should he ever discover I had deceived him deliberately, for then he would not rest, I knew, until he had found out the full reason for my deception. In the intricacies of this man's strange mind was an insatiable curiosity as to the minutest detail and an uncanny memory for the same.

I decided, therefore, upon entire truthfulness up to a certain point, with the hope that any suspicions that might be lying dormant in the great man's mind might be so far allayed that he would not think it necessary to inquire further; for there were certain facts in my

past which, should they come to his knowledge, would not benefit my position with him.

"Your Highness knows that I am a man of the people," I began gravely. "I am of quite lowly birth. My father was, until his death, blacksmith on the Surrey estate of the first Lord Lovet. I was born in a cottage at the park gates, and my mother acted as gate-keeper for many years, until age and infirmity prevented even this activity. She is now bed-ridden and lives in a small cottage upon the common, within three miles of our old home. It would break her heart to leave the district, and her great desire is that I should come to live near her.

"As a bare-legged urchin I often saw little Lady Rosamond riding past upon her pony, and, indeed, frequently held the gates open for her and for other members of the family, for Lord Lovet resided principally at Rookherst Place in those days.

"At the age of seventeen, however, I left home and never returned except on rare and fleeting visits. My history from the age of twenty-two I believe I can flatter myself is already known to your Highness."

Oliver Cromwell nodded. The ingenuousness of my reply evidently satisfied him, and he now regarded me with friendly curiosity.

"I confess your choice appears to me to be unwise, Williams. You would have done better, in my humble estimation, to have fixed upon the alternative I offered you. The young heiress of fifteen would be

easily molded into shape, but a woman of twenty-five at least, and a widow to boot, is a much more complex problem. However, I can understand your wish to be near your only remaining parent; a mother's love can only be partially repaid by a son's utmost devotion, as I myself know to the full. Still, I misdoubt the future for you, General. However, I have always suspected you had a bit of the gambler in your disposition, for all your outward caution, and if you bring the same methods to bear upon your matrimonial difficulties that you do upon military problems, and handle your future wife as you do your men, you will deserve to succeed. You will make your own arrangements as to the wedding, to suit your convenience; the lady, I fancy, will be indifferent as to details of date and hour and place," he added with a slightly grim smile.

Then, with a friendly handshake, he dismissed me; but, as I passed over the threshold, with his habitual caution he drew a bow at a venture, and remarked casually:

"By the way, do not lose sight of the fact that Lady Killigew has been, up till now, hand in glove with the malcontents, and a most useful agent for our friends overseas. Once she is under your authority I shall expect to feel no further anxiety from that source."

For the third time I saluted deferentially, and was this time suffered to depart.

If the soul of a gambler resembles mine at that

moment, it must be a most unenviable one, for, far from feeling any jubilant anticipation or thrill of excitement, I must have been the most doubtful and depressed man in Whitehall that afternoon, as I made my solitary way along the great gallery.

For I, Peter Williams, a major-general in the army of the Commonwealth and son of a country blacksmith, was about to undertake a most insane step. I was contemplating marriage with a woman of independent wealth and of culture and birth far above my own, a widow, also, and not a widow of a *mariage de convenance* either, but the widow of a love match, the idolized husband having only been removed by death in a revolutionary affray within the last three months. The position would appear hopeless enough at that, but, to add to the folly of it all, I, the son of the blacksmith, was in love with the lady, and had been in love with her for as long as I could remember.

It was this fact, for one, that I wished to keep from Cromwell's knowledge, for, as like as not, had he suspected any such blind infatuation on the part of his apparently phlegmatic subordinate, he would have canceled the contract on the spot, for it might lead to dangerous consequences to have a trusted officer madly in love with a recognized Royalist agent. As it appeared on the surface, the marriage was just one after his own heart, for Cromwell, with his usual hatred of using force or cruelty where milder methods would answer equally effectually, was fond of arranging such

marriages as this one, where, with no open show of coercion, Royalist estates and family sympathies could be gently brought over to the side of the Commonwealth.

In this instance the coercion was perhaps more apparent than usual, for young Lady Killigew, heiress in her own right to the estate of Rookherst, in Surrey, would certainly never have consented to remarriage had it not been for the unfortunate fact that her only brother, younger than herself and most dearly beloved, was now a prisoner in the Tower under sentence of death for seditious plotting against the state. To secure his pardon and release, his sister had agreed to accept any husband the state (which meant the protector) should think fit to choose for her, and to hand over the title-deeds of Rookherst to the said husband upon the wedding day.

It might be argued, the same object could have been attained by forcing the heiress to make over her estates as a whole without her person, but this more brutal form of confiscation did not meet with Oliver's approval; as he explained in his laborious, involved way to me, a better and more lasting value was gained by looking ahead, for, by a marriage like this one, the offspring of such a union were in the natural line and yet were secured for the further support of the state as descendants of a loyal Republican father, thus avoiding ill-feeling and old family sores. The lord protector had earlier in the proceedings commented upon the

fortunate fact of there being no issue of the first marriage in the case of Lady Killigew.

"I hope you will soon have a son to carry on the good old principles," he had said genially, and I recalled the words now with mixed feelings, as I made my gloomy way home to my quarters at St. James's.

Once arrived in my own room, I sat down, and, filling my pipe, deliberately marshaled all the facts before my mind's judgment, and the verdict given without hesitation was that I, Peter Williams, was a fool and deserved all the misery which would inevitably come upon me.

The mischief had begun when, as a ragged boy of ten, I stopped to admire the golden-headed little girl of six, scolding her placid nurse, striking her with her baby fists, and stamping her little arched feet with imperious rage.

The stout nurse had only smiled and meekly yielded the point, whatever it was, for that detail has escaped my memory.

From that day onward the golden-haired child became my obsession. I used to watch for her from my mother's cottage window, eager to run out and open the great iron gates for her, longing in vain for a look, or smile of thanks, satisfied for the moment if her blue eyes even rested casually upon me. It was folly, and a folly I recognized as such, and carefully kept hidden from the knowledge of my big, sensible father and my wise, loving mother.

As the years passed and I grew up into young manhood, my parents began to look round for a mate for me, and their choice fell upon my cousin Matilda, a sober, godly young woman, in every way fitted to make me just such a wife as would keep me in the straight paths of virtue and sobriety, and perhaps restrain a certain headstrong tendency to sow wild oats.

But, alas for their hopes and loving plans, no cousin Matilda would do for me. I was sincerely fond of my cousin, but ask her to marry me I would not.

Other suitable maids were suggested, but from all of them I turned with the same feeling of aversion, quite inexplicable to my parents, who became seriously annoyed with me.

It was just about this time that an accident occurred which altered the whole course of my life, and probably had more to do with bringing me into my present situation than anything else.

It occurred in this wise.

I was then seventeen and the little Lady Rosamond must have been thirteen, and just recently affianced to my Lord Killigew, a penniless Irish nobleman, some years her senior, to whom she had furiously lost her heart. There had been opposition to the engagement on the part of Lord and Lady Lovet, who had planned great things for their beautiful daughter, but the spoiled darling inevitably carried her way, and the match was duly arranged.

The engaged couple came riding down the avenue

one sunny afternoon when the chestnuts were in blossom, and I happened to have strolled out, all grimy from my father's forge, for I helped him at the anvil now.

At the sight of their smiling, contented faces a fit of mad jealousy took possession of me. Instead of hastening forward, as I should, to open the gates for my master's daughter, I continued to lounge at the entrance to the forge, as though I was unaware of their approach.

Even at a sharp reminder from the young man I did not hurry, but moved in so leisurely a fashion that the horses' breasts were almost upon the gates before they could rein them in.

I admit it was reprehensible, but I was tired of perpetually cringing and begging, as it were, for the favor of a kind glance or even a word of common courtesy through all the past years.

I would win some notice by the reverse method, if by no other; and I certainly did so, for with a furious gesture the beautiful girl turned upon me, whip raised in hand.

"You unmannerly lout," she exclaimed. "Let this teach you behavior," and she brought the whip down with all her pretty strength.

I fancy she must have expected me to duck my head, or guard myself with my arm, but, as I did neither, the lash curled round my face and neck with a whistling sound, and I can almost feel the sting of it now.

No doubt perturbed by the sight of the lash-mark, which must have been doubly noticeable through the grime upon my cheeks, Lord Killigew ventured a mild remonstrance with his lady-love, but she evinced no sort of contrition, and on the contrary exclaimed decisively:

"The creature deserved all he got, and will receive even another such stroke if he does not profit by this lesson. Marry, you great loon, will you remember that, and speed your lumbering person the next time I require the gate opened?"

It was certainly magnificent, if entirely unladylike, and I ruefully acknowledged that she had in no whit lost her place in my youthful estimation by her chastisement of myself.

I was angry, all the same, and the smart on my face added to the heat in my heart, and no doubt gave to my expression a forbidding aspect, which was carefully noted by the Irishman, as was proved before long.

This is what I learned later through my cousin Matilda, who was by this time employed as one of the still-room maids at the big house.

It seems Lord Killigew, on his return, went at once to Lord and Lady Lovet, and gave them an ornate account of the incident, expressing some fears on his fiancée's account lest the ill-looking ragamuffin who had figured so undignifiedly in the affair should attempt some form of revenge.

My Lady Lovet, from whom her daughter had inherited her hot temper and imperious will, was all for having the aforesaid ruffian clapped in the stocks at once and soundly whipped later on at the cart's tail, but her lord, being a singularly just man and wishful to avoid all scandal, decided it would be best to have the blacksmith's son deported from the county as a ne'er-do-well, and, being a justice of the peace, this order was duly carried out, with the result that I left my home hurriedly one night, at the age of seventeen, to seek my fortunes elsewhere. Within the same year the Civil War broke out, and by force of circumstances more than from any clearly formed principles I joined the side of the Parliament and at once found my sphere.

It is a little difficult for me to judge now as to whether, had all things moved normally, and I had been in the employment of the Lovet family, I should still have taken up the opposing side in this great quarrel. Probably I should have begun by throwing in my lot vehemently on the side of my Lady Rosamond, but I believe that before long my slowly developing principles and ingrained passion for emancipation and self-expression would have forced me, all unwillingly, to go over to the Roundheads, as we came to be called.

I was saved any such deliberate and painful wrench by the play of circumstance.

My career in the army was one continued upward progress; fortune played into my hands all along; I

was a free agent, with no responsibilities and a natural aptitude for fighting; I had inherited my father's physique and something of my mother's Scotch foresight and caution, all of which stood me in good stead. It was the day for rapid promotion; ancient landmarks and old lines of social cleavage were swept away, and the successful soldier, whatever his birth, carried all before him.

I came beneath the notice of Sir Thomas Fairfax. He was a quiet, reserved man, little known at that time and handicapped by a stammer, but he suddenly pushed through to the top of things, and I came up with him.

I now come to the second episode which I was anxious to keep outside the protector's ken.

While serving under Sir Michael Livesey in Surrey, I was in command at Redhill during the Royalist rising of June, 1648, and, as luck would have it, found myself harassed by a small but resolute body of the enemy who had made Rookherst Place their headquarters.

There was no alternative but by forced marches to bear down upon the stronghold and force its surrender.

We mapped out our attack carefully, and I was warned by my superior to expect a bloody affray and much loss of life on both sides, but I thought otherwise, and trusting to my intimate acquaintance with the

geography of the place laid my plans accordingly.

It turned out even better than I had dared hope. The surprise was complete, so much so that my men had cut off the force garrisoned in the outbuildings within the moat, and had actually taken possession of half the house itself before the servants and household were awakened by the disturbance.

We then had only the actual household retinue and the women-folk to deal with, and, what was more, I learned that my Lord Killigew was abed with his lady, fearing no ill and trusting in his stalwart sentries upon the moat, all of whom were at that moment, unarmed, cursing and swearing and kicking at the doors of a large cowshed.

The family sleeping apartments at Rookherst Place are entirely separate from the rest of the house, occupying the extreme eastern wing; and by holding the main staircase, which descends into a great paneled hall, we had completely cut off this wing from the main part of the building and thus held my lord and lady and my lady's personal waiting maids prisoners at our mercy.

Notwithstanding this, however, one daring man, well armed, could do much havoc as a sharpshooter, for there was a small window belonging to one of the bedrooms projecting into the great hall, and at this window protruded the barrel of a rifle.

The fight had been bloodless so far, and it appeared

to me a pity to lose even one of my brave fellows if it could be avoided, and so I raised my voice and stated my terms :

“Unless Lord Killigew comes down alone and unarmed within ten minutes, I will shoot offhand twenty of his men, loot the entire premises, and then set fire to the house. If his lordship surrenders himself, the rest of the household may go their way unmolested, and the house shall be put under careful guard and its treasures preserved.”

I was well aware that to secure the person of his lordship would be a feather in my cap and worth any concessions, for he was already famed for his reckless courage and daredevilry as a leader of cavalry, and had been marked down as a formidable foe, with a price upon his capture, alive or dead. True, by surrendering himself he would be giving himself up to imprisonment for life, if not to certain death ; but that was his affair, not mine, and I was fully resolved to carry out my threat if need be. One cannot afford to be squeamish in war.

I gathered that there was a hurried consultation in the room behind the window ; the barrel of the rifle was still visible, but I could catch the sound of low voices from within the room in earnest colloquy.

Acting upon my orders, a score of the disarmed guard were formed up in the open doorway behind which we stood, in full view of the window, so as to

add point to my words. This evidently had the desired effect, for a man's voice presently called out from the upper room:

"Lord Killigew is prepared to submit to your demand, and will surrender himself on condition that you let all these men go free and evacuate the house and grounds."

"Form these men up outside and prepare a squad to shoot," I commanded curtly. "Also have fagots brought in to fire the place."

There came an angry oath from the window, and the same voice spoke hurriedly:

"Have it your own way, and a curse on you. I will come down."

And come down he did. It was the middle of the night, and the place was badly lit with a few candles and torches we had brought with us, and as the solitary figure, fully dressed in military cloak and helmet, descended the wide staircase, my captain nudged me and whispered:

"We had best have a care, sir, had we not, that there is no deception practised: this may not be Lord Killigew. How shall we tell?"

"I know Lord Killigew well by sight," I replied shortly. "I cannot make any mistake."

As soon as the man was within distance, after I had made sure he was unarmed, I took a step forward, and, snatching a torch from one of my men, flashed it

over his face. The scrutiny satisfied me, and I gave orders for the prisoner to be removed behind, under close guard, until I could deal with him.

Then I called out in a loud voice:

"Will Lady Killigew and her women please come down. I pledge my word she shall be permitted to go her way unmolested."

Four figures, heavily cloaked and hooded, forthwith descended the stairs and crossed the great hall, a desolate little group, walking reluctantly.

"Which is Lady Killigew?" I asked. One of the women took a short step forward and replied in a low but firm voice:

"I am Lady Killigew."

I did not trouble to resort to the torch.

"Very well, madam. I will instruct my men to see that you and your attendants are suitably mounted. I am sorry I cannot permit you to speak with your husband. Captain Forbes, please see to my Lady Killigew's requirements."

Turning away, I motioned the guard to conduct their prisoner to a smaller room, evidently a dining-room, which opened out of the main passage leading from the outer entrance to the large hall.

"You can leave Lord Killigew here. I wish to have a word with him in private. See if you can find some wine and other viands, and bring in some more candles," I ordered.

An old man herewith hurried forward from some

dark doorway, and I recognized with amusement the family steward, Masterman, whom I had known by sight from my childhood.

"May I be permitted to wait upon my lord for the last time, sir?" he quavered. "I am an old, old man; you need have no fear of me, and I should esteem it a great favor. I have the key of the wine-cellar," he added craftily.

I nearly laughed aloud, so well did he simulate extreme old age. He could not be much above fifty, I knew, but in the uncertain light and with his shoulders humped up and a rickety gait the illusion was complete. I could not but admire and respect his faithful courage.

"Very well, old man," I replied; "go and get some wine for your master, and be as quick about it as your age permits."

I waited for the door to close upon the two of us before I remarked carelessly:

"Well, my Lady, what have you to say for yourself?"

With a startled cry she lifted her head and let the candle-light flash beneath the heavy-brimmed helmet.

"You knew! How did you know, and when?"

"I knew from the moment I passed the torch over your face," I replied equably. "You see, I happen to be acquainted with your husband's features."

"He said he had never met you before, to his knowledge," she said, dismay in her voice. Obviously she

had hoped to keep up the ruse until the escaping party had had time to put several miles between themselves and me. She now dreaded their recapture, and her uneasiness was pitiful.

I regarded her in silence for a few seconds, dwelling upon the perfect features, and noting the familiar imperious little mouth. Then I said slowly:

"There is time to send several parties after your husband, and I have no doubt at all but that we should cut them off successfully."

"Why do you not do it, then?" she cried, stamping her foot with nervous irritation. "Why are you playing with me?"

"I am not exactly playing with you," I replied. "I am exacting a payment. Listen. Upon one condition, and one only, will I let your husband escape. There is not much time; your steward will be back in a few minutes, and then it will be too late. If you will give me a kiss, I will give you your husband's life."

Her eyes blazed upon me like sapphire flame.

"Kiss you! How dare you! you hound!"

"Very well," I replied composedly, rising to my feet.

"Nay—stop! I —— Why do you ask this? What payment do you mean?"

"That is my affair, madam. You are merely losing time."

She looked at me with a sort of helpless rage which was almost ludicrous.

Then she took a step forward. Then another, and another, until she was close to me.

Here she paused and drew herself up with a haughty movement, and waited.

I waited also.

Obviously she expected me to take the opportunity graciously accorded by her to kiss her.

As I made no move, she drew her delicate brows together sharply, but there was also perplexity in her expression.

“I did not say that I should kiss you, madam; I said I required a kiss from you.”

Her anger broke out afresh.

“Your impertinence is insufferable. I would rather die than do it.”

“Quite likely,” replied I; “but, as it happens, it is your husband’s life, not yours, which will be sacrificed by your foolish self-will and vanity.”

The struggle in her soul showed itself pitiably in her beautiful face. Then love conquered; stooping toward me, she hesitated, and then whispered:

“Where do you wish me to kiss you?”

I thought of my swollen, bleeding lips from the whip-lash.

“Kiss me full on the mouth,” I said deliberately, and she obeyed,

The deed was scarcely done when steps sounded in the flagged passage, and the door was opened carefully by the steward, bearing a tray of food and wine.

He shuffled forward with the uncertain footsteps of the aged, but as his gaze fell upon his young mistress all semblance of age left him.

Straightening himself up with a comical jerk, he ejaculated in a forceful voice:

"Good God have mercy upon us! What are you doing here, my Lady? Where is his lordship?"

"His lordship, I hope, is now in safety," she replied gently, her face aglow with the new joy of self-sacrifice. It had been a case of taming the shrew temporarily at any rate, and there remained no doubt in my mind that she loved her husband.

The faithful servant now turned to stare in a puzzled way at me. There must have been some chord of memory touched by my appearance, possibly a resemblance to my father, but he evidently could not for the moment explain it, for my name was as yet unknown to both my companions.

"You appear to have become rejuvenated in an extraordinary way, Mr. Steward," I remarked with a grin. "Perhaps, after all, you are not too infirm to act as escort to her ladyship as I had feared. Could you undertake to see her into some place of safety ere morning, if I provide you with mounts?"

The man's fine face lit up with surprise and gratitude, but there was no hint of the latter sentiment in

my lady's. She was evidently satisfied with the explanation I had given for my queer action, and believed it was some self-indulgent whim and no quixotic motive that had actuated me.

It was some time before the laugh in the barrack-room ceased over the way in which the colonel had been tricked by a woman. My captain was a thoughtful young man and may have made a shrewd guess at the mystery, but if so he allowed no hint to leak out.

I made the best explanation I could to Lord Fairfax. Had I had General Cromwell to deal with I fancy I should not have come through so well, but Fairfax was a peculiarly generous man, and would have been likely to do just such an action himself. At the time also he was hard pressed for men and supplies, and too thankful to learn that I had captured the rebel headquarters with so little expenditure of either to complain much of the bungling through which the leader had been allowed to slip away.

This was the episode I was anxious to keep from Cromwell, for he might well argue that an officer who could let sentiment outweigh his sense of duty was not a safe person to place in the way of similar temptation again.

CHAPTER II

MY LADY'S RELATIVES

ABOUT a fortnight before my wedding I went home to visit my mother. I had already informed her by letter of the step I purposed to take, so that she was forewarned, and I was prepared for some straight words on the subject, for my mother was direct in all her ways and still looked upon me as her wayward boy, to be counseled or chided as the case required.

Nor was I mistaken. I found my mother greatly perturbed over the matter, and she did her utmost to shake me in my mad resolve while there was yet time to withdraw. Finding that futile, she at length desisted and, gazing at me sadly, said:

“I had hoped you would have grown out of it.”

“Grown out of it? What do you mean, Mother?” I exclaimed in amazement.

“I always feared this, my son,” she replied quietly. “I used to notice how you watched for the little Lady Rosamond from the window at the old cottage, and I saw how the thought of her possessed you; but I hoped that the years of separation from the sight of her

would dull the passion. I kept the knowledge from your father, lad, because I knew it would vex him. He being so set upon the gentry, it would have seemed to him a shocking thing for one of his blood to lift his eyes to a lady of birth. And, ah! my boy, I fear me such a passion will bring naught but ill-fortune upon you. I can see nothing but trouble ahead. It is not even as though you would be going to live in some part where you would not be known. You are coming back to a neighborhood where every one knew you before as the son of Peter the Blacksmith. Her ladyship cannot fail to look upon it as a double insult to herself. To be forced to give herself in marriage at all, so soon after her husband's death, is a hard enough yoke for her proud neck to bear, but how much harder to have added to that the bitter fact that the man she must marry should have actually once been a servant on the estate. It must seem to her insupportable. I cannot understand, myself, how it is she appears to have consented. Are you sure she comprehends who you are, Peter, and is doing it with her eyes open?"

I nodded gloomily.

"Yes, Mother; all the facts have been told her. She cannot very well refuse, you see, for the lord protector has signified that it is his wish that I should be the suitor chosen for her, and when her relations made some demur he made short work of it, and threatened to withdraw his proposal altogether and have the young Lord Lovet hanged without delay."

My mother sighed deeply.

"It is as if it were the decree of heaven," she said sadly. "Everything has seemed to conspire to force her into your arms when on the face of it such a happening would appear to be incredible. Well, my son, since it must be, let it be carried through with wisdom and discretion. Remember that by marrying Lady Rosamond you become her rightful lord and master. You must not lose sight of that fact. Do not let her trample disdainfully upon you and treat you as dust beneath her delicate feet, as she will if you permit it, for, noble-born lady though she be, we know her high bearing and undisciplined temper. She hath been spoiled and yielded to all her life, doted upon by her parents and by her husband, with every whim and caprice satisfied. Unless you can hold your place, my son, your place will soon not hold you, and you will become not only the talk of the countryside, as you are at present, but also the laughing-stock of the same before the year is out."

Plain speech, this, from my old mother, and I admired and loved her for it.

I kissed her pink, wrinkled cheek, and replied dutifully:

"I will strive to follow your advice, Mother."

She held me from her by her withered old hands upon my shoulder, such firm, strong hands, even yet; and her eyes smiled humorously up into mine.

"Ah, lad, I see you are laughing at your old mother.

I should have remembered that you are a big man now—a major-general, they say! And you are a big man, too, in other ways, and not likely to make a mistake in the handling of your fate. But a woman is a queer thing to deal with, and I thought I had best give you a word of warning from a woman's knowledge of women. I believe it was not necessary, though. Another fact, too, which reassures me somewhat is that they say my lady has become very different since her parents' deaths—particularly after the good old lord departed this life. She grieved greatly for him, and since then she has scarcely lived here at all, but has made her uncle's home her headquarters during these past troublesome years; and I hear she has benefited greatly by the influence she has met with there, for Sir Reginald Lovet is like his brother, the old lord, a generous, open-hearted gentleman, and withal truly religious and of Puritan principles, and a man of stronger nature than the elder brother ever had. It may be that you will find her less passionate and self-willed now, and therefore more reasonable."

"There was certainly room for improvement," I remarked dryly.

I took up my abode in the tiny house on the common that I had bought for my mother several years previously. She had urged me, in a half-hearted way, to take lodgings in the village of Lingfield, which was within a mile or two. It would be more suitable, she had argued, for me in the exalted position I had at-

tained as a major-general. It would not do for me to be living in a thatched cottage with an old bedridden village woman, who happened to be my mother. When I stopped her flow of argument with a kiss and gave orders for my valise and trunk to be carried up the narrow oak stairs, she leaned back on her pillows with a sigh of extreme content, and I heard no more about fine lodgings in the village.

It thus came about that when my Lady Killigew's relatives decided they must get into communication with me personally they had to find their way out to the thatched cottage upon the common in order to do so.

Her cousin, Captain Lovet, was the first to seek an interview. He turned out to be a man about my own age.

His object was clearly to feel his way in order to find if there was any hope of buying me off.

He arrived one fine afternoon without any warning. I was smoking a contented pipe in the little front garden when my visitor rode up. He was a handsome, well-set-up man, and held himself haughtily, as befitted a younger scion of noble family when treating with the son of a blacksmith.

It had its comic side, and I hope I behaved myself properly. I know he was first angry and confident, then puzzled and doubtful, and lastly almost humble. He began with commendable straightforwardness by offering me a round sum there and then if I would

withdraw my claim, and, when I did not appear to jump at the bribe, he set himself to explain to my dull intelligence, with laborious clarity, how untenable was my position and how impossible a situation it would create if I persisted in it. It was unthinkable that the widowed Lady Killigew should wed a person of my birth, however creditable to my character and endeavors my present military status might be.

"You see, my dear sir," he said, with a touch of restrained impatience, "although you are a general in the army, that does not constitute any social claim and cannot do away with your birth. Your friends and relations, you can understand, have not risen with you——" And he glanced round comprehensively at my modest surroundings, his eyes resting for a moment upon a fat old sow which grunted inquiringly at us through the gate, as she paused in her walk on the common.

I considered the problem thoughtfully.

"What do you propose, then, sir?" I inquired. "Supposing I cast off my relations and have nothing further to do with them, would that render me more acceptable to her ladyship?"

He still tried to restrain his growing impatience.

"By no means. Can you not see for yourself? Must I be more explicit? It is you yourself that her ladyship objects to. It is your person in particular that she would esteem it a gross insult to have thrust upon her."

"Why so?" I asked stupidly.

"Why so!" he exclaimed, letting loose his ungovernable anger. "You have the stupidity or the impertinence to ask that?—when you know the stock you have sprung from, common laborer on the estate that you were—when you know the insulting way you behaved to Lady Killigew on the occasion of the surprise attack upon her house when you took advantage of her helplessness to humiliate her for your own amusement!"

I was interested in this statement. Evidently, then, my lady had taken pains to find out who I was, which was perhaps only natural, but it pleased me a little, fool that I was. Even to be remembered by her was something.

I thought it time now to throw off all semblance of misunderstanding the situation.

"Well, Captain Lovet," I remarked, eying the young man gravely and steadily, "I think you have made the matter very plain from your point of view. I confess I was under no illusion from the commencement, and let me now tell you that it is not for place or title or money that I contemplate this marriage. No bribe on your part, however alluring, would move me. Indeed, the bribe should be the other way, for no man could be faced with a less alluring prospect than I, as it appears from all you say and from all I know of Lady Killigew. My matrimonial path, far from being

garlanded with roses, is likely to be set with thorns and thistles from beginning to end."

He stared at me, obviously impressed by my sincerity.

"Then why, in heaven's name, persevere in it?" he cried, a glimmer of hope adding a boyish note to his voice.

I returned his eager look gloomily.

"Because I happen to love the lady."

His jaw fell and an expression of incredulous amazement spread over his face.

"That is not possible."

"Why not?"

"Because you have never had the opportunity for falling in love with her, man," he retorted sharply.

"How much opportunity does one require, in your opinion, for that?" I asked equably, knocking the ashes from my pipe.

He made no reply, but continued to stare hard at me, as though he had not properly seen me before.

Then he said slowly:

"Was that the reason you acted in that inexplicable way that night of the affray at Rookherst?"

"Possibly."

"You permitted Lord Killigew to escape."

"I believe so."

"And that was because—because—you—er—loved my cousin?" He seemed to find the words difficult.

I made no reply.

"My God!" he exclaimed suddenly. "It is a queer mix-up. I had never expected this."

"Well," I asked for the second time, "what do you propose, then?"

He scratched his head with frank perplexity. I liked the man—I liked his steady glance, and I liked his straightforward bearing. He bore out what my mother had heard said of his father, the old Lord Lovet's younger brother, and I could imagine the good influence such a home circle would have upon my poor, lovable, wayward lady.

At length he spoke again, and this time diffidently, almost humbly:

"There is only one more argument I can bring, sir. Because of this love you bear her, will you not withdraw your claim for her sake?"

"No—I will not." My furious words drove the startled sow grunting away as fast as her short legs would carry her enormous weight.

Captain Lovet drew in a quick breath, and for a second laid his hand upon his sword. Then, letting it drop, he said quietly:

"Very well. I see I have failed entirely. There is no more to be said. May I acquaint my cousin with what you have told me?"

"If you think anything can be gained by that, certainly you may do so," I replied, and I suppose my

voice sounded tired and unhopeful, and must have touched him, for he smiled a little and said:

"I think it may. You mean to deal well with her?" he added, a shade of anxiety in his tone.

"I have told you so. If Lady Killigew is prepared to carry through her part of the bargain loyally in spirit as well as letter, I swear to her that there shall be nothing lacking in my attitude or actions which could help to make some sort of success of a difficult undertaking. It will depend upon her, for the most part."

"Nay, I think not." He spoke in a low, passionate voice which surprised me by its intense earnestness. "As far as your future wife is concerned, I can answer for her. Whatever she undertakes to do will be done with the utmost loyalty and generosity. She has consented to sacrifice herself for another, and she will do it to the full. If the success of this lamentable bargain rested principally upon her, all would be well; but it is upon you that the success will rest—upon your treatment of her. And, by heaven, if you fail in aught toward her, you will not escape unpunished while my father and I are alive."

I was astonished by this outburst, until the truth came to me. This man loved his cousin; and what more natural? He had had plenty of the opportunity for falling in love which he deemed indispensable.

Within a week of this visit I received a letter ask-

ing me to go down to Hampshire, to visit Sir Reginald and Lady Lovet in their home.

It was a formally worded but courteous invitation, and I accepted it without hesitation, but wondering in my mind what it was intended to accomplish. Would I, by any chance, meet my Lady Rosamond there? Could it be possible that she would add an appeal for herself on her own account? A personal appeal such as that would be indeed a powerful weapon to use. I felt it would be taking an unfair advantage of me; but I could hardly visualize my lady humbling her proud soul sufficiently to undertake such a step, and this thought reassured me somewhat.

On arriving at Tunhill Park I was met by Captain Lovet at the entrance to the beautiful mansion, and after a word of greeting, given with a touch of constraint on his part, he led me into a spacious hall, where I found Sir Reginald and his lady awaiting me.

Sir Reginald Lovet, although younger than the first lord, lately deceased, looked older by many years, for his beard and hair were snow-white, accentuating the extraordinary keenness of his dark eyes.

There was an imperiousness in his expression which reminded me of my lady, and which made me realize that she did not inherit her high spirit only from her maternal parent, as I had previously supposed.

Altogether, Sir Reginald Lovet was an impressive personality, far more so than his noble brother had ever been.

As for the little gray-haired lady at his side, for all her silk and satin and point lace she reminded me of my own dear mother, wrinkles included.

Sir Reginald advanced to meet us and gravely acknowledged my salute, for I was in uniform, but he did not offer to shake hands, nor did the little lady give me her hand to kiss, though her glance was kinder than her lord's.

I realized at once that I was only there on sufferance and because necessity bade.

Sir Reginald did not waste much time in coming to the point—his son must have learned his direct methods from him. Having inquired perfunctorily after my journey, he gave me a straight glance, saying abruptly:

“General Williams, with your consent we will retire to the library, being more private for the talk I wish to have with you.”

I bowed in silence and followed him and his lady into a small room leading off the hall. Captain Lovet did not accompany us.

Sir Reginald closed the door and, leading his wife to a large carved chair by the fireplace, motioned me to seat myself also, indicating a chair directly opposite the window, where the light would fall full upon my face.

I felt sure the chair had been arranged in that position deliberately, it was so conspicuously out of its place; and I was faintly amused as I thought of the

plotting and planning there must have been before my arrival.

The old baronet took up his position opposite me, and fixed his hawk-like eyes upon my face.

“My son, Captain Lovet, has told us of all that passed between you on the occasion of his visit last week. You must pardon me, sir, if I cannot suppress my amazement at the statement you made to him. It seems to be quite incredible that you should be sincere in the assertion that you—er—have—er—conceived a passion for my widowed niece. I have taken the step of asking you to come to see me personally in order that we may be able to come to an understanding. You, no doubt, feel you can reasonably claim a larger sum than Captain Lovet was empowered to offer you, and I am prepared to meet your demands to the utmost of my ability. I am not perhaps as wealthy a man as you may suppose, but as you rightly judge my niece is very dear to me, and I have therefore much at stake, and must be prepared to pay highly for what I ask.”

I confess this bold directness fairly staggered me. I had had the conceit to believe that I had convinced Captain Lovet of my sincerity at least; so much had I taken this for granted, in fact, that I had not given that part of the matter a second thought.

Yet here was I being frankly suspected of extortion, accused of playing at being in love in order to demand a higher price. I hastily reconstructed my position

in my mind so as to decide what line of action to adopt. My irresolution must have been perceptible, for Sir Reginald's piercing eyes flashed triumphantly and his fine mouth curled in a faintly derisive smile. Settling himself back more firmly in his chair, he awaited my reply, with the obvious certainty of what the nature of it would be.

I slowly rose to my feet, and, picking up my helmet and gantlets, bowed soberly to the little lady in the high-backed chair, and then, turning to Sir Reginald, said simply:

"I think, in that case, sir, you made a mistake in sending for me, and I only regret you put yourself and Lady Lovet to the trouble of doing so. I will, with your permission, return to my home without further delay."

I flatter myself the fine old man was as much staggered now as I had been a minute before.

His hands gripped the arms of his chair; leaning forward, he ejaculated in a voice trembling with suppressed irritation and chagrin:

"What do you mean, sir? For heaven's sake, be honest. What do you want?"

"I do not want your money, anyway, Sir Reginald," I replied, with a depth of anger far greater than his own. "I am no extortioner. I can understand that your niece is dear to you and that this marriage is most repugnant to you for family reasons. I can understand it, I say; I acknowledge you have some cause,

perhaps; I will even say good cause, for your objection. But because I am of a different standing to you, a man of low birth—no birth—that is no excuse for denying me the possibility of being actuated by pure motives. I love Lady Killigew and desire her for my wife because I love her, and for no other reason.”

Sir Reginald rapped out an oath.

“You have no right to love Lady Killigew,” he exclaimed. “It is rank impudence in one of your position.”

“Reginald, my love,” interposed a gentle voice from the fireplace, “do you not think you may be a little unjust to General Williams, in the heat of your feelings?”

I was amazed at the effect of these softly-spoken words; the old baronet turned a look of almost shame-faced affection upon the little lady; then, looking again at me, he said in an altered tone:

“Perhaps I am. This affair touches me so deeply that I can scarcely answer for myself.” He paused, then added with an effort: “I am forced to believe what you say, General Williams, and I perceive that my son was right in his opinion that it was futile to try to move you in your resolve. It seems, therefore, that we must bow to the decree of heaven, as it almost appears to be.” I was startled at hearing the phrase used by my mother repeated by this man. It seemed like an omen. Sir Reginald’s next words brought me back sharply to realities.

“Before I agree to withdraw my opposition to this—this sacrifice of my niece, I must hear from your own lips that you will treat her with all the reverence and consideration you are capable of and which she will deserve. Here is a Bible. Swear to me now, in the presence of Lady Lovet, that you will do this.”

“It does not appear to me necessary to take an oath upon this,” I said coldly. “I have already informed you what my feelings are with regard to Lady Killigew; that should be sufficient.”

His pent-up wrath and bitterness broke out again.

“Between gentlemen it would be sufficient. But I do not know your standards, sir, and frankly misdoubt them.”

It was a deliberate insult, of course, and I know I winced and felt my face grow hot.

“I am afraid I cannot hope to have the opportunity of explaining to you the standards of a son of a blacksmith, sir,” I replied quietly, “and I am afraid also you will not have the satisfaction of an oath to set your mind at rest. I have not the slightest intention of swearing upon the matter. But I am prepared to give you my word of honor as a—” I paused, while his eyes challenged mine,—“as a Puritan officer that I will act toward my future wife in as gentlemanly a fashion as I am capable of.”

At the mockery in my tone he flushed and drew himself up haughtily, and I fear things would have come

to a rupture between us two angry men had not the little lady again interposed.

"There is one little point, General," she broke in, as though nothing was amiss between us. "When you are married, we should not like to feel entirely cut off from our dear one. I feel sure you will not make any objection to your wife paying us a visit periodically."

The words were casually spoken and her voice and manner quite placid, but I am a cautious man by nature, and the simple request roused my misgivings. I threw a sharp glance at the delicate smiling face, and detected the anxiety in her blue eyes.

A further glance in the direction of the old baronet, to find that he was regarding me eagerly, confirmed my suspicions.

Yet the appeal I read in both faces disturbed me. I decided to be quite frank with them.

"Lady Lovet," I said slowly, weighing my words with care, "there is no need for us to dissimulate when alone, as we are now. You know quite as well as I that this marriage is going to create a difficult situation. What the outcome of it will be heaven only knows. I do not attempt even to guess. But it must be as plain to you as it is to me that even trifles may help or hinder what small chance there is of this marriage becoming some sort of a success. It seems to me that it would be only fair to allow me to have at least one full year in which to do the best I can to win

my wife's confidence and, if possible, reconcile her in some small degree to her fate. Any visit to her old surroundings must undoubtedly hinder this by reviving past memories. I ask you to give me this year of grace undisturbed. On the other hand, I promise you that should my future wife declare her wish to go on a visit to you before the year is out I will not lift a finger to prevent her doing so, but I shall trust to your honor as a *gentleman*, Sir Reginald," I laid a faint stress upon the word, and I saw him wince this time, "not by word or deed to encourage her to extend her visit to greater than ordinary length. I shall be glad if you will let Lady Killigew know of this request on my part, so that she may be fully cognizant of my wishes beforehand."

There was a moment's silence in the room; then Sir Reginald spoke gravely and with an effort.

"General Williams, it appears plain to me that I have misjudged you. I apologize for my hasty words. You must realize that your future wife is very, very dear to us. My niece, since the death of both her parents, has resided the greater part of her time here with us and has become as a daughter to us. This must be my excuse for the attitude I have taken up. Also," and there was severity in his glance, "I still maintain that it was an impropriety on your part to conceive this feeling for Lady Killigew, but I think I did not sufficiently take into consideration certain

qualities of character which I recognize now you possess. I sincerely trust you will bear no ill-will toward me for the hard things I have said."

It must have required a noble effort on the part of this haughty old baronet to bring himself to utter this apology. I think there was mutual respect in the glance we exchanged as I responded frankly enough:

"I bear you no ill-will whatsoever, sir."

The soft voice from the fireplace again broke in:

"Let me, for my part, say that we fully understand your attitude regarding the matter of our dear child visiting us, and thank you for your frankness. I will inform her of what you have said, and I feel sure she will respect your wishes."

I smiled slightly as I thought of my wilful, imperious lady.

"I do not know as to that," I said, a trifle grimly. "I cannot conceive of my future wife waiting for my permission if she desired to leave me."

I thought Lady Lovet looked at me curiously.

"You may think so," she said slowly, "but I do not fancy you have any real knowledge of your future wife. I imagine you only judge her by a few isolated occurrences, or perhaps by hearsay. She has developed greatly of late. She has always had a high sense of duty, and I believe, if she marries you, she will be a faithful wife to you and prepared to do all that is in her power to help make the marriage a success."

These words conjured up such a vision of happiness that my head swam. If this prophecy could really become true, what contentment lay ahead of me!

Something of this new-born hope and eagerness must have shown itself in my face as I asked, with a touch of diffidence:

"Is there any possibility of my seeing Lady Killigew? Is she here?"

The little lady looked at me kindly, and actually smiled.

"Nay, I fear that is not possible."

I recognized the gentle repulse, but I could not resent it, realizing it was meant kindly.

Within a week I must, in my case, meet my lady, for we were to be married before that period was passed. My momentary reverie was interrupted by Sir Reginald rising to his feet and remarking:

"I will conduct General Williams to his room, Lettice. Is your valise already here, sir?"

I held the door open for Lady Lovet before replying quietly:

"No; I left my luggage at the inn, Sir Reginald. I deeply appreciated your courtesy in inviting me, in your letter, to spend the night with you, but I feel in the circumstances this would be trespassing too far upon your chivalrous kindness. If you will excuse me, I will return to the tavern for the night, as I leave early to-morrow."

The old man gave me a steady look.

"No, sir," he said shortly. "You are mistaken. I shall be disappointed if you do not stay here."

His wife must have paused outside to listen to this conversation, because her pretty silvery voice now sounded from the hall:

"You must let us send for your bag, General; indeed you must. It is because we feel we are going to like you that you must stay."

I confess I blushed like a boy at the gentle archness of her tone. I could well understand why Sir Reginald had fallen in love and continued so much in love with this merry, youthful spirit, undimmed by the wrinkles and gray hairs.

The apartment assigned to me was a beautiful room, and I found myself treated with all the attention accorded to an honored guest.

Moreover, the dinner that evening was not the ordeal I had prepared for. My hosts avoided entirely all dangerous ground, and purposely led me on to talk of my military experiences and other topics both safe and of mutual interest.

It seemed as though they deliberately set themselves to draw me out, and several times I found all three pairs of eyes fixed scrutinizingly upon my face while I was talking, a fact which might have embarrassed me, but for the curious feeling I had that these people, far from criticizing me, were eager to find all the good they could in me. Such a conviction tends to re-

assure a man rather than take away his confidence.

I left early the next morning, Sir Reginald and his lady both rising to bid me good-by.

As I bowed low over Lady Lovet's delicate fingers the little lady murmured softly:

"Good-by, General Williams. I am glad you came, for now I believe our dear one will be in the care of an honest man."

Sir Reginald, for his part, made no movement to shake hands, though his glance was not unfriendly as he bowed in response to my salute. Neither did Captain Lovet and I touch hands. Evidently the two men were not prepared to go to the length Lady Lovet had gone in receiving me into their confidence.

Nevertheless, as I prepared to mount, my foot in the stirrup, standing in the sunshine upon the gravel sweep fronting the house, I glanced back at the group in the entrance, and felt that I would like above most things to be acceptable to these people. I craved their liking and approval, and desired keenly to be admitted into their family circle. I had lived a lonely, arduous life since the age of seventeen, and I realized that I thirsted for love and family ties.

CHAPTER III

JOB FORSTER

MY wedding day dawned promising fair, but it was with very mixed feelings that I rode up to Rookherst that Friday, at one o'clock, accompanied by six of my fellow-officers and special friends, among whom was my former captain, now Colonel Forbes.

That discreet person never by word or glance betrayed the fact that he recollected any unusual midnight episode connected with the fair owner of Rookherst and myself.

One would have imagined it was his first visit to the place, and I was secretly amused by his discretion.

We were met at the main entrance by the steward, Masterman, who ushered us with all due deference into the large hall.

Here we found Justice Eldon awaiting us, with his clerk and two notaries to deal with the legal transfer of the property; for in accordance with the law then in operation it only required a justice of the peace to perform all that was necessary to marry us, the church

ceremony having been done away with with the prayer-book.

We stood grouped carelessly in the great recess formed by the window, and I noticed how the red and blue reflection from the painted glass lay upon the polished floor over which my lady must walk when she entered.

It seemed a long interval before she arrived, but when she did come into the hall, leaning upon her uncle's arm, I started as though I had not been expecting her.

My fellow-officers and I naturally stood with our backs to the light, facing my lady as she entered, and we must have looked much alike in our red tunics and metal breastplates, with scarlet sashes across our chests, and swords fastened to our sides.

The moment she entered the hall, my lady raised her eyes and flashed a scrutinizing glance at us. I could catch the blueness of her eyes even at that distance, and I thought I read doubt and uncertainty in her expression. It must be remembered that she had only seen me on that midnight occasion in the dim candle-light, about seven years before; small wonder if she failed to pick me out at once.

With an egotistical desire to discover whether my features had impressed themselves upon her memory sufficiently for her to detect me of her own accord, I remained motionless and apparently as impassive as my companions.

I saw her glance travel for a second time over our faces as she approached slowly across the intervening space; then her eyes met mine and rested there for the fraction of a minute before she lowered her lashes, and the delicate color swept over her face—she had recognized me.

The actual ceremony which made us man and wife did not, I suppose, occupy more than ten minutes, even including the affixing of the signatures of the witnesses to the marriage papers.

It was the most unreal experience I have ever been through.

The justice of the peace, holding the directory in his hand, inquired whether we desired to marry one another, and, upon my lady and I each replying in the affirmative, he forthwith declared us to be man and wife, his clerk producing the parchment to be signed and sealed.

After this had been duly done, the notaries came forward with the deeds concerning the property, and the necessary signatures were put also to these, whereby the residence named Rookherst Place and the lands appertaining to it were duly transferred by the Lady Rosamond to her husband, Peter Williams.

The steward thereupon served sack all round, and our healths were solemnly drunk by the company; after which the wedding guests took their leave. No inducement could prevail upon Sir Reginald and his son—Lady Lovet had not accompanied them—to re-

main at Rookherst for the night, and my own personal friends were busy men, and were obliged to return to duty, having already had their midday meal with me at the tavern at Lingfield. When the last of them had bidden me good-by and wished me God's blessing, and I had seen the hindermost horseman out of sight, I returned slowly and with beating heart to the great hall.

I found my lady still there, awaiting me in the recess of the window, but I had scarcely taken a few steps across the floor before the steward, Masterman, entered behind me, and upon my turning round in response to an apologetic cough the fellow handed me a great bunch of keys. I took them from him with an inquiring word.

"The keys of the principal doors of Rookherst, sir," he explained respectfully, with his eyes obstinately fixed upon the floor; but I noticed his face was unnaturally white, and the hand which held the keys trembled.

So I was now master of Rookherst, and of all appertaining to it, including its former mistress.

It was a strange prank of fortune indeed. I held the keys in my hand and weighed them carelessly, while I thought. Then, handing them back to the man, I said pleasantly:

"Well, Masterman, you have been a good guardian of them all these years. I hope you will live to guard them equally well for as many more."

The fellow jerked his head up in evident astonishment. It was clear that he had been fully prepared to be given his notice of dismissal.

Our eyes met as man to man, and I continued, without altering my tone:

"As to the rest of the servants, I shall prefer to make no alterations beyond empowering you to dismiss any that you have reason to be dissatisfied with, after informing me of that reason. Any servant, man or woman, who has served my lady faithfully I shall be glad to retain and raise their wages in proportion to the number of their years of service."

Masterman bowed gravely and left the hall in silence, bearing the keys with him. The silence in the great room was broken by a voice from the window, and at the little note of mockery in it I with difficulty repressed a start.

"You are a bold man, sir, in the circumstances, to surround yourself with devoted servants of the family who from the loftiest to the meanest feel this marriage a personal affront. Will you employ a wine-taster and wear a steel corselet beneath your doublet?"

I approached her deliberately, my eyes fixed steadily upon hers.

Her glance had never before met mine with any other expression save that of anger or indifference, and it came as a physical shock now to read both curiosity and mockery in those astonishingly blue eyes.

"Madam," I said gravely, "I am perfectly secure,

for you will be both my wine-taster and my corselet."

She drew herself up with a little haughty movement.

"How so?"

"Because, madam, in so far as you are loyal to your bargain and fair to me, so far will your servants imitate you, and I have sufficient faith to believe you will be this."

The mocking light died out of her eyes, and she gave me a curiously intent look, but made no reply to my words. Instead, she remarked inconsequentially:

"Would you care to see over the house and grounds? I do not fancy you are as yet fully acquainted with them."

Her manner was perfectly easy and frank, and I recognized with a throb of relief that if she dealt in this direct manner with the situation the difficulties with which it literally bristled might be overcome, if not smoothed away entirely.

"I shall be glad if you will show me the place," I replied. "I hardly know the interior of the house at all. The outer boundaries, the grounds, of course, I am familiar with from childhood."

She hesitated a second, glancing doubtfully up the staircase.

"Shall we begin with the rooms upstairs, and gradually work downward, and then go outside?" she asked in a most practical voice.

I acquiesced, and she thereupon led the way up the wide oak stairs.

Half-way up there was a bend, and a small landing before the staircase continued to the right. At this bend she paused.

"You will notice that this wing of the house is entirely separate from the rest," she explained.

I carefully avoided catching her eye, for her remark vividly recalled the events of that night seven years before, when this fact had put her and her husband at my mercy.

She then preceded me up the remaining flight of stairs, pausing at a door immediately on the right.

I divined this must lead into the room with the little window into the hall, the room she had been occupying on that fateful night.

Without any hesitation she opened the door and entered, walking straight across to the large window opposite.

"This is my room," she remarked calmly. "There is a magnificent view from this window, if you will come here to look at it."

I obeyed, casting a curious glance round the apartment as I did so. It was obviously a woman's room.

To the left, opposite the little window in the interior wall, was a door—no doubt connecting with the room formerly occupied by her deceased husband. The view was indeed magnificent, for Rookherst stood high, and, beyond the perfectly kept garden immedi-

ately surrounding the house, the country lay rich in corn-field and hay-meadow and undulating pasture-land, until it lost its outlines in the misty blue hills of the distance.

After a moment's pause, during which we stood side by side, gazing at the scene, and I was conscious of her nearness to me, my lady turned and, retracing her steps, laid her hand casually upon the latch of the door connecting the rooms.

It was locked.

"We will go round by the other door," she remarked coolly enough, but with a hint of vexed constraint in her tone.

"All these rooms face south, as you see," she continued conversationally, throwing open the door leading from the gallery and revealing a similar room to the one we had just left, if a trifle more austere in its embellishments. My attention was immediately attracted to a fine piece of tapestry covering half of the wall and completely concealing the connecting door. I glanced at my lady, and saw that a frown ruffled her fair brow, but she continued speaking calmly:

"The smaller rooms on the left of the gallery are used as a rule by the personal servants, such as my maid and your valet; and there is another large bedroom at the end."

She then conducted me down the stairs again and across the hall to the other wing, where were the guest-rooms, servants' rooms, and kitchen premises.

We did not spend time here, at which I was glad, for there were too many curious eyes, peeping at us surreptitiously, for my comfort, though my lady showed entire unconcern. She might have been showing the mansion to a prospective purchaser rather than to the husband just forced upon her.

Presently she led the way out of doors. From the main entrance we passed along a paved footway bordered by a small lawn on either side, to the bridge over the moat; beyond this, on the left, stood the stables and outhouses; immediately in front stretched the gardens; and to the right lay a small lake fringed with high bulrushes, and its banks sown with iris and foxglove.

With a continuance of that same matter-of-fact composure, my lady led me through the rose-garden, the herb and fruit garden, the sunken garden after the Dutch style. She pointed out some exquisitely blue-tiled swimming-baths and explained that Lord Lovet had laid great stress upon his children learning the art, and had had a special instructor to teach them. But she did not draw my attention to an out-of-door theater cleverly built of grass banks, the dressing-rooms and wings formed by hedges of clipped yew hedges. As a strait-laced Puritan, I suppose she imagined I would disapprove of all such frivolity, for she passed it by without comment, and I marveled at the gracious tact which showed itself even in this little detail,

We were approaching the stables from the back, when a red-faced stable-boy ran out towards us. He appeared to be laboring under some extreme excitement, judging by his flushed cheeks and dilated eyes, and the fact that he could scarcely speak.

I caught the words "big dog" and "dead," and in an instant my mind sprang to the truth.

I had left my faithful hound, Don, fastened up in the stables while I repaired to the house to be wedded, and now it was evident some ill-fate had befallen the good beast.

Turning quickly to my lady, I said: "I fear it concerns my dog. With your permission, I will go with this boy to see what has happened."

"I will come too," she exclaimed. "Surely no harm could have come to the dog." There was acute anxiety in her voice, which caught my attention, even in the midst of my perturbed thoughts.

We entered the stable-yard through a side door, and the scene which confronted us confirmed my worst fears.

In the midst of a group of stable-men and boys lay my dear old Don, his legs drawn up in agony and his head thrust out in the stiffness of an approaching death-struggle.

I was kneeling beside him in a moment, and at the sound of my voice he tried to turn his head and even feebly wagged his tail. There was no sign of any

wound upon him. I had no doubt in my mind but that he had been poisoned.

I glanced sharply round—a water-bowl lay near, and I noticed, to my relief, that it was still three parts full. If the poison had been administered in his water there might still be a chance of saving him; but there was no time to be lost in doctoring him.

As if in answer to my unspoken thought, I heard my lady's voice at my elbow.

“Will you not have him carried up to the house? There may be hope of saving him, and there are many medicines and valuable herbs at hand there which you could apply.”

Two stalwart men bore the dog to the house and laid him down by the entrance. In the meantime my lady and I had hurried on in advance, and I had concocted a simple emetic which had its desired effect. I then dosed the poor beast with brandy and massaged him well, and to my joy soon saw that the evil was conquered and that he would recover. My lady had hovered round us like a ministering angel all the time, and when I at length rose to my feet she met my eyes with tears in her own.

“You think he will recover?” she asked.

“I am sure of it,” I replied.

“He must not go back to the stables,” she said emphatically. “Let him be brought into the hall and a mat laid for him, so that he can be under your eye, in case he relapses.”

I was more moved than I dared show by her thoughtfulness.

“It is very good of you, madam, to show this consideration for the poor beast,” I said quietly, “particularly as he is of no breed whatsoever, a mere low-class mongrel.”

There could be no doubt that she caught my allusion, for she flushed faintly, though her tone was quite impersonal as she replied:

“He has a faithful heart, which shows in his eyes.”

Later on that evening, when alone in my room, I took a mirror and stared long and closely into my own eyes. Was there anything in them to show that I, like Don, had a faithful heart? I shook my head doubtfully, for all I saw was a pair of blue-gray eyes set rather far apart in a tanned face beneath a square forehead. No, Don was far superior to his master in the matter of expressive orbs.

I must mention before this, however, that Masterman had come to inquire of me which room I would prefer to occupy.

“I have put your valise in this room, sir,” he had said in his expressionless voice, opening the door of the room next to my lady’s; “but if you prefer the larger room at the end of the passage I will have your things moved there.”

“Thanks,” I replied quietly, “this will do very well. My man, I believe, will sleep opposite.”

On reëntering the room I observed instantly that

the tapestry had been removed and the door stood revealed, and in the lock upon my side was the key.

I changed my uniform for black silk doublet and trunks, trimmed with silver lace, and descended again to the large hall, about half an hour before the hour fixed for supper, as I was anxious to see how Don was faring.

I found him sleeping profoundly, and marveled at the extraordinary recuperative powers animals have.

While I stood watching him with a smile, I heard a light tread upon the stairs and the soft sound of a woman's gown, and there was my lady turning the bend and gazing down at me.

I was surprised and delighted that she should be coming down so early, and with my pulses throbbing I watched her descend the remaining steps. How beautiful she was, and how perfectly the rich shadowy black velvet showed up her dazzling skin and wonderful eyes and hair.

My lady was a queen among women. If she was put out and displeased to see me already there, she did not show it, but came straight up to me, and for a moment stood beside me, looking down at the sleeping dog in silence. Then she moved away a few steps before turning to me and saying abruptly:

"We must not disturb him with our voices, but I want to have a word with you, and it please you, sir."

Gladly I followed her to the window recess.

"I am more distressed than I can say by what has

occurred," she began, with that curious directness I had already learned to associate with her and her relatives. "The occurrence has shocked and astounded me. I cannot understand how any one could have done such a dastardly thing."

I looked at her curiously.

"But I understood you to have warned me of the risk of just such an occurrence, madam, only of a more personal nature," I remarked.

She flashed a glance at me, and in its imperious anger I recalled my lady of old.

"You must have known I did not intend those words to be taken seriously. I spoke in mockery. None of my servants would lift a hand against you, for they know my honor would be involved if aught of harm befell you under this roof."

I shrugged my shoulders.

"I should have thought it an easy way out of a difficulty," I said carelessly.

"Then your standards must be different from mine, sir," she retorted; but even as the words crossed her lips I think she regretted them, for as our eyes met she flushed scarlet. Moving abruptly to the table, she rang a silver bell.

In response to the summons, a footman entered the hall.

"Light the candles, Forster," commanded my lady.

At the name I glanced at the man, and, although it was many years since I had seen him before, I recog-

nized him immediately. I watched him moving from sconce to sconce, lighting the long wax candles, and my thoughts traveled back to the early days of our boyhood's rivalry, for Job Forster had grown up with me, and ever since I could remember we had quarreled and fought, from our first great fisticuff, as little more than toddlers, over a giant horse-chestnut that had fallen between us and which I had been quickest to pick up. I kept that mighty chestnut for many seasons, and it remained conqueror in spite of hard batterings, until I destroyed it myself to save it the indignity of defeat in its hoary age.

Years, and the reason which years are supposed to bring, did not improve our relations, and the climax arrived when Job asked Matilda to marry him, and she refused him.

I recalled the day he came to me with a face whitened by passion and accused me of playing fast and loose with my cousin, and so bewitching her that she had no eyes for an honest man. He accused me of more, for which I struck him on the mouth, and we then and there had the greatest fight we had ever had. We were both big, heavy lads, but I was not blinded by the same insane rage as he, and I left him on the ground, sobbing for breath.

All these scenes came back to my memory as I watched Job Forster light the candles. I had not heard that he was in service at Rookherst, and won-

dered why my mother had omitted to tell me; perhaps she had forgotten, in the preoccupation of other more exciting events.

There was another, newer thought in my mind also, as I watched Job Forster light the candles, and I confess I was startled when my lady, immediately upon his leaving the hall, put me an abrupt question:

“Do you think you have any personal enemy here, General Williams? Any one who would have poisoned your dog out of spite?”

Spite was not the feeling I should have applied to Job. His sentiment toward me as a lad had been hatred pure and simple. There was, I believe, nothing petty about it; if he could have killed me, by fair means or foul, he would have done so in those days; of that I felt no doubt. But that was many years ago; the edge of my own anger and dislike had been so entirely blunted since then that I could not conceive of his not being so, too. I am a cautious man, however, and in my mind I argued that Job was not a type to be satisfied with half-measures; if he still thirsted for vengeance, he would not stop at poisoning my dog.

I would not tell my lady of my doubts, however, and I replied, with as naturally assumed surprise as I could manage:

“What makes you ask this?”

“Because,” she retorted impatiently, “as I have said before, none of my servants would do you harm.”

"In that case it must have been done by some one from outside, unless it was only an accident, which is quite possible," I replied.

"I mean, none of my servants would harm you from any foolish, mistaken idea of loyalty to the family," she explained. "Another motive must be found for such an act."

"I see. I will bear that in mind," I replied thoughtfully.

She regarded me in silence for a few seconds, with knitted brows.

"Why will you not admit that you have known that man Forster before?" she asked suddenly.

I hid my astonishment.

"Why should I either admit or deny it?" I inquired. "I have known the steward, Masterman, before, and my cousin Matilda, the still-room maid. The majority of the servants here are familiar to me at least by face."

"You know that I mean more than that. This man Forster is an old enemy of yours, and there can be no doubt but that he is the one who poisoned your dog. He was seen to cross to the stables this afternoon."

I did not attempt to hide my surprise now.

"How did you find out all this, madam?" I asked, eyeing her keenly.

"It was my duty to do all I could to trace the culprit," she replied, with a note of triumph in her tone. "I talked the matter over with Masterman, and we

went through the names and histories of the servants. Acting upon a hint from him, I sent for your cousin Matilda, and she gave me all the information I needed."

I confess I flushed a little. My peculiar position was thrown into strong relief by the fact that my wife had to gain her information of my past through the medium of one of her maids, who happened to be my cousin.

"Well," I asked, after a moment's thought, "what if this man be the culprit? How will you prove it? He cannot be dismissed on that score without proof."

"That is true," she said slowly, "and proof is difficult to obtain, as no one saw him actually in the stable-yard. But, being foiled, it is probable he may try again, and we cannot run risks. He may go further next time." She looked at me oddly. "Will you permit me to make an experiment to-night, to test him?"

"By all means. What part do you wish me to play?"

"Will you refrain from tasting your wine until I have taken the step I contemplate, and will you pretend there is a wager between us?"

I stared at her, and she met my glance steadily.

At that moment Masterman announced that supper was served. Without a word I offered my lady my arm, and she took it.

Never in my wildest dreams had I believed it possible that she would deal so kindly with me.

Supper was served in the very room where I had

forced her to kiss me, on that night seven years before. I grew hot all over at the recollection and groaned inwardly as I thought of my brutality on that occasion. The wonder was that she could ever forgive me, and here she was now planning to save me from harm.

The head steward served us himself, with the assistance of Forster, the footman, but I noticed it was Forster who carried round the wine and filled our glasses.

In obedience to my lady's wishes I did not touch mine during the meal.

After the last course, my lady suddenly rose to her feet and, leaning forward, quietly took my filled glass from before me, replacing it with her own.

"I constitute myself your wine-taster, in accordance with my wager," she said in her clear, bell-like voice. "Let me drink to your health, sir."

Steadily she raised the glass to her lips, her eyes upon mine, but, reflected in the mirror behind her, I saw Masterman suddenly grip Forster by the shoulder.

"See, my lady, he is as white as a ghost and trembling in every limb; there is no need to seek further proof," the steward exclaimed.

Indeed, my old enemy looked a sorry figure, with perspiration standing out in small beads upon his ashen face.

My lady put down the glass and eyed him sternly.

"Do you mean me to believe that this wine is poisoned?—that there is any servant of this house-

hold wicked and cowardly enough not only to attempt the death of an innocent animal, but to plan murder beneath the roof that shelters him?"

I could see that Job Forster strove to quiet his trembling muscles and recover his composure, but unluckily his eyes fell upon me at that moment and an expression of insane fury swept over his face.

"I will not deny it, my Lady," he cried hoarsely. "I did hope to kill that man, and so rid you, and another luckless woman, of his evil influence. He is no fit mate for your Ladyship. He has wronged one woman; he will—"

My lady stopped his furious words with a sharp command:

"Be silent! How dare you!"

He eyed her sullenly, but continued:

"I speak what I know. That man, years ago, played with a woman, and threw her over when he tired of her. I loved that woman."

Here was a pretty kettle of fish!

I was frankly dumfounded at the turn of events. This was confusion worse confounded, with a vengeance!

Before I could decide upon any course of action, however, I heard my lady say calmly:

"You lie, Forster, whether you know it or not, and in your madness you are besmirching the character of the good woman you profess to love. I have spoken with Matilda Sefton, and know the unhappy story of

your unrequited passion. Until your master, General Williams, decides what shall be your fate, you shall be placed in the guard-room. Masterman, please see this man is kept in close custody. Ring the bell for a couple of lackeys to take him in charge. And, Masterman, will you make it known in the servants' hall that from this time onward I shall, as the humor seizes me, take it upon me to taste the wine and food supplied to my husband."

When my lady and I were alone in the great hall, where we had repaired after supper, I turned to her, my heart in my eyes, I fancy.

"I owe you both my life and my honor," I said gravely. "You saved my life—for that I owe you much; but you refused to believe the accusation against me, and for that I am a thousand times more grateful."

She flushed a little and drew away from me.

"The tale was already discredited by the facts I had learned previously," she said quietly.

I blessed my faithful cousin Matilda in my heart. Aloud I said:

"There is also something else I would like to say. I noticed, madam, an alteration in the room I am occupying—the room next to yours."

I saw her eyes flicker and waver before mine, but I held their gaze, exerting my will over hers.

"The tapestry over the communicating door had

been removed, madam," I continued deliberately, "and the key was in the lock. I take it that this was done by your orders, and I believe it to mean that you are prepared to fulfil your bargain to the full and raise no barrier between us?"

She was white to the lips, but she met my eyes steadily now.

"I am prepared to fulfil my bargain in as far as it is in my power to do so, sir, and raise no barriers in addition to those already there," she replied; and there was cold dislike in her tone and glance.

I nodded.

"Then, madam, I return you the key, for it is not my intention to exact that bargain to the utmost. Keep your door locked or not, as you please, but remember that one word from you will always be a greater barrier to me than all the locks and bolts you can protect yourself with."

She stared at me with dawning wonder in her face, and I continued with the same deliberation, hiding the tumult in my heart:

"It seems to me that this first night of our wedded life should be a fit occasion for expressing myself clearly and so unmistakably that there will be no need for repetition. Listen, my Lady. I intend to woo you and win you for myself. You start, I see, and your expression is incredulous. That is because you do not know me. I have not loved you for twenty years to be

balked in the end. I went through this marriage ceremony in order to give myself the opportunity, which it would have been almost impossible for me otherwise to have had, of courting you and winning your love. Madness, no doubt, you think it. Maybe it is; time will prove this. You need not shrink from me in fear, my Lady. You will suffer no unwelcome attentions, or violent force, from me, such as, I regret, occurred on that night seven years ago. I swore on that night that never again would a woman's lips touch mine against her will.

"I do not fancy I will ever lay bare my soul to you again after to-night, until the hour comes when I know you are mine. But, for to-night, let me tell you that I hunger and thirst for your love as a man in a desert might hunger and thirst. Again and again during these past years I have tried to tear your image from my heart, and take to me a wife of my own class, who would be a loyal mate and give me the warm affection which makes a home. But it was a futile effort. I found I must bear with loneliness and homelessness, for I could not loyally take to me any wife but one."

I paused, and she drew in a quick breath.

"I cannot understand it," she said, looking at me curiously and speaking in a constrained voice. "It seems to me incredible that you should have come thus to care for one who gave you no encouragement—who, indeed as far as I can recall, treated you with scorn and contempt on the few occasions you came in contact

with her, and even struck you when you happened to offend her."

I set my lips grimly.

"It is a fact, nevertheless, strange though it may be."

She studied my face thoughtfully for a few seconds.

"But what sort of—of—love can it be," she asked, "that is based upon such inadequate knowledge?"

Her question rather took me aback, and she saw her advantage and pursued it triumphantly.

"It appears to me to be merely a blind infatuation for a romantic creation of your own brain, rather than passion for a real person."

"Possibly," I replied coolly. "But now I have the Real Person."

She started, and it seemed to me there was awe almost approaching fear in her expression as she stared at me.

"I do not understand what sort of a man you are," she muttered doubtfully, "but I fear you are bound to be disappointed. It would have been comparatively simple had you sought the attainable, but as things are it is quite beyond my power ever to give you what you crave."

"That time will prove, madam. I am a patient man."

She shook her head.

"Time and patience have nothing to do with it, sir, as you will find to your disillusionment," she retorted with emphasis. "And I warn you now, since we ap-

pear determined to speak plainly, that, although I am prepared to act up to my bargain in as far as it is in my power to do so, there are certain limits beyond which I cannot go, certain bounds beyond which you may not step. There will always be locked doors between us, sir, invisible doors which you will never have the right or the power to enter, and which, for your own comfort of mind, I advise you never to seek to pry into. I begin my life with you from now on a clear page. Write what you will upon it, sir, and I will make no complaint, for I have counted the cost; but do not presume to think you may turn over and peruse what was written before. That I have the right to withhold from you."

"I have your permission to make love to you, I suppose?"

She flushed and frowned. Then, reading the irony in my expression, her lips twitched with what was obviously a hysterical desire to laugh.

"It is like a horrible farce," she exclaimed. "I do not know whether to laugh or cry, to take you seriously and feel outraged, or to believe you are mocking me, and to be insulted."

"I am afraid it is too late in the evening for me to try and clear up the problem, madam," I replied coolly. "Possibly a night's rest may help you. You must be tired after such an eventful day, and so I will not detain you further, but light you to your room."

I lighted a candle for her and accompanied her up the stairs, at the head of which her maid awaited her. Then our eyes met once more as, with a deferential bow, I bade her good night.

CHAPTER IV

DOORS LOCKED AND UNLOCKED

I HAD been granted two months' leave of absence from duty. Two weeks of this I had already spent with my mother; the remaining six I intended devoting entirely to the wooing of my wife. The end of the first week of these six weeks found me a baffled and bewildered man.

My lady had evidently, from the beginning, mapped out for herself a definite course of conduct, and had she adhered to it consistently I might have had some chance of understanding her, but, womanlike, I suppose, she found this impossible; hence my bewilderment.

By tacit understanding we met one another on the morning following our wedding as though no frank conversation had taken place between us. She had resumed her previous pleasant, courteous manner and attitude of well-trained hostess toward an honored guest. Her morning greeting was the perfection of self-possession and good breeding. The little smile with which her words were accompanied was quite friendly and also quite impersonal, and her blue eyes rested

calmly upon mine without a trace of self consciousness and with an equal absence of self-revelation.

The clean page to which she had referred was evidently presented to me, very white, very new, entirely soulless, and I was left to make what I could of it, which was not much.

I realized before an hour had passed that if I was to make any progress at all toward the achievement of my goal I must break through this impersonal barrier and, whether for my weal or woe, get at the real woman behind.

True to her agreement, she had evidently resolved to put herself entirely at my disposal, and any suggestion of mine that we should walk together or ride together was met with instant acquiescence, with the result that day after day we were to be seen either riding or walking in each other's company, no doubt to the extreme bewilderment and scandal of the neighborhood. But my lady showed no concern, if she felt any. She responded with careless graciousness to the deferential greetings of the tenants and village folk, and before long I had opportunity also of observing the attitude she adopted toward the neighbors of her own standing. We happened to be riding abreast down a narrow road, when at a bend we came face to face with a certain Mr. Penant, a squire of some repute in that part of the county.

He was a man of great arrogance of character, disliked and feared rather than respected by the peasantry,

and though I had never personally come in contact with him before I knew him well by sight.

On recognizing my lady, this gentleman immediately swept off his hat and bowed almost double over his horse's neck.

"Ah, Lady Rosamond," he exclaimed, "this is indeed a pleasure. My daughter and I were just saying we felt it was quite time we paid you our respects. I hope you are as well as can be expected after your sad bereavement, my dear lady."

"Thank you, Mr. Penant," replied my lady simply. "I am well." She paused a moment, and then added quietly: "You have, no doubt, heard that I have married again."

The squire threw a sharp glance in my direction; then deliberately turned his shoulder to me, saying in a loud tone:

"Yes, I did hear of that disgraceful coercion of a beautiful woman and a devoted widow, who was willing to sacrifice herself for her brother's sake. You have my deepest sympathy, my Lady."

"I am sure your sympathy is kindly intended, sir," replied my Lady, without any alteration of tone or expression. "The lord protector, I fancy, has little respect for considerations of the kind you mention, but on this occasion he has had the grace to choose an honorable gentleman for the part he wished played, and for that I am grateful. Let me introduce to you my husband, General Williams."

The man's face of bewilderment was comical; his already bloated countenance seemed to swell out and became like a beet-root in color. With obvious difficulty he forced himself to turn and look at me again. In response to my salute he raised his hand half-way to his hat, and then dropped it again, with a smothered oath, only to lift it again this time as far as his hat-brim upon finding my lady's eyes fixed gravely and commandingly upon him.

It was abundantly clear to me that it was my lady's intention to guard my life, my honor, and my dignity with the utmost jealousy; and this attitude did not altogether surprise me, for it was in keeping with that haughty pride and spirit of *noblesse oblige* which I divined would dominate her in all her actions, even to the submitting of herself to an otherwise intolerable position. This curious loyalty to my person and position, however, did not, I realized, help one whit to the accomplishment of my purpose. I was as far as ever from my lady; the invisible barriers were as impenetrable as before.

Indeed, I came upon one of the closed doors of which she had spoken upon the very first day's ride.

By way of making conversation rather than with any definite purpose, I spoke of my visit to her uncle's home, and asked her a casual question about her cousin, Captain Lovet. Upon receiving no response, I glanced inquiringly at her, and was both chagrined and amused to read in the set of the profile turned to

me that her silence was of deliberate purpose. To make it still more unmistakable, she turned and directed a steady glance upon me, at the same time quietly changing the subject to an entirely impersonal one, thus giving me to understand that I was barred from all that concerned her past life and intimate personal relations.

It was a rebuff, and I confess I flushed under it and made a mental note to avoid for the future any occasion for its recurrence; at the same time I cast about in my mind for a method whereby I could establish some sort of personal footing, for this, I felt, was essential if I was ever to get at my real lady at all.

For the nonce I bowed to her will with the best grace I could, and confined myself strictly to topics of superficial and passing interest, until I perceived the austerity of her expression gradually relax, and she resumed her former pleasant, courteous bearing.

Seen at close quarters, by daylight, my lady appeared even more beautiful than I had believed her to be. Her complexion was as flawless as a child's, and her hair of ruddy gold was enhanced by contrast with the black beaver hat she wore for riding, adorned with its single drooping feather.

The imperious self-will which had marred her expression in early youth had become replaced by a more disciplined pride. Her lips in repose closed in firm, beautiful lines, almost severe in their calm strength,

but when she talked or smiled her face altered to an extraordinary degree; the eyes under their level golden brows seemed to glow as though the sun shone through their heavenly blue, and a provoking babyish dimple would suddenly appear in the peach-like cheek. How I grew to love that dimple, and plot and plan how I might call it into life!

It is difficult for most men, I suppose, to speak frankly of their childish days, of their home life and boyhood's ambitions and follies, unless to an audience of proved sympathy and understanding; to a shy, reserved nature such a proceeding must be harder still; but if, added to this natural diffidence, there should be actual uncertainty of the character of the audience and of the kind of reception such self-revelation would receive, it can be imagined what an effort such a step would involve. This was exactly my situation. As my lady would not admit me into her confidence, I resolved I would throw open the sanctuaries of my inner man to her, that I would, as it were, open the door of my humble cottage abode for her to look into, even if she would not deign to cast therein more than a glance of disdainful curiosity, or possibly, worse still, of shuddering repulsion.

It required an effort, as I say, to do this, and the effort lent an unnatural constraint to my voice, which I tried my best to conquer.

We were riding past my father's old forge when I opened the subject. The forge had been unused

for many years, and, having fallen into disrepair, was now overgrown with creepers and ivy—a picturesque spot enough, used only as a wood-shed for the lodge-keeper's cottage.

I do not quite know how I began. I know I stumbled a little over my words at first, and felt furious with myself for doing so. After all, I told myself, if my lady did take advantage of the opportunity given her to show how utter and entire was her indifference, it would be no more than I had reason to expect, and would not mortally wound me.

So I continued. I spoke of my life in the cottage and at the forge. I spoke of my father, so big and bluff, and of my mother, gentle-voiced and delicate, who ruled him with a rod of iron all unconsciously. I did not look at her as I went on speaking almost mechanically. I felt I was not making my personal history at all interesting; every word was weighed with effort, and the silence with which she listened, or appeared to listen, added to my nervousness. I derided myself for a self-conscious fool and continued doggedly.

And then she acted in one of those inexplicable ways that, as I say, rendered me a bewildered, besides a baffled man by the end of the week.

She turned to me suddenly, like an impulsive child, and her eyes of heavenly blue smiled full into mine.

“Tell me more,” she demanded. “I should like to

hear all you did as a boy, and later on, when you went to the war."

Had I been Don, I fancy gratitude would have been visible in every part of my body, from my furiously wagging tail to my eloquent eyes and wet, quivering nose, but being only an extremely inarticulate human being, profoundly unused to self-expression, I could only give her an awkward glance of thanks and set myself to obey her command.

From that time onward we talked often of my past life. I told her of my experiences in the wars and, encouraged by her frank interest, I recounted small personal episodes, some of pathetic and some of amusing character, and was delighted to see her eyes soften with tears or sparkle with spontaneous merriment, as the case might be. My lady had accepted my invitation and entered my parlor, and, though she had excluded me from crossing her delicate thresholds, I felt I had made a big step forward and I was a contented man.

Thereupon I dared yet another step.

I asked her if she would come to see my mother.

My lady hesitated, and an almost startled expression came into her face.

"Do you wish me to do so?" she inquired presently, and I smiled at her tone, for it so clearly implied, "Is this to be taken as a command from you as my legal lord and husband?"

"I should deem it a favor," I returned gravely.

She inclined her head.

"Very well; I will accompany you whenever you desire."

It came about, therefore, that my lady and I rode together the next afternoon, through Lingfield, out to Frogett Heath and across the common to my mother's little cottage.

It was a silent ride, for my lady scarcely spoke, and, depressed by her distant manner and reserved expression, I too became tongue-tied. The hot sweet scent of gorse never fails to recall that ride to my mind, for as our horses plunged across the hummocky grass between the massed bushes of golden furze, the perfume, heavy of cocoanut, rose to my nostrils from all sides.

My mother had already been warned of the visit, for I had ridden over to see her the previous evening, as was my invariable custom.

She was, therefore, sitting up in bed, propped up upon snowy linen pillows smelling of lavender, with a lace cap upon her neat head and a new fleecy shawl around her shoulders.

A dainty and adorable picture, to my mind.

Her greeting of her visitor was all that I could have wished—a mingling of natural dignity and diffidence. My lady was obliged to stoop her head to enter the modest apartment, and it seemed to me emblematical of the enforced stooping of her haughty spirit; and perhaps the same thought came to her mind, for I

noticed she flushed, and for a second her golden brows were drawn together in a little frown.

I am sure my mother's keen eyes noted this, for she told me afterward that her heart sank within her as she beheld my lady's haughty expression on her first entry. She showed it not in her manner, however, and there was nothing I could have desired altered in her soft-worded greeting.

"I am indeed honored, my Lady, that you should have taken the trouble to come so far to see me," said my mother. "Pray excuse my being unable to rise to bid you welcome, as is befitting. I have been chained to my bed by rheumatism these last two years."

My lady approached my mother's couch and gravely took her hand in hers. I could see the two women take stock of one another as I watched the little scene, so ordinary and yet so fraught with importance for me.

Then my lady smiled and, turning suddenly to me, said quite naturally:

"Is n't your mother like my aunt, Lady Lovet?"

I hid my amazement and delight at her inconsistency. My mother had accomplished what I had been unable to achieve. My lady had refused with me to mention any of her relatives, and here she was referring to her aunt and actually asking my opinion of a likeness I had myself noticed.

My dear old mother blushed a pretty pink and looked quite confused at the unexpected compliment.

"I do not think there can be any real likeness between the Lady Lovet and myself," she exclaimed in an almost horrified tone.

My lady continued to gaze at her in an interested way.

"But there is," she persisted. "It is quite an astonishing likeness. Do you not think so, too?" she inquired again of me.

I nodded.

"Yes. There is an undoubted resemblance somewhere," I assented.

My lady then sat down beside the bed, and I presently sauntered out of the room and left the two together. What passed between them I never was told in full. Possibly nothing much was said. Women have queer ways of understanding each other, and getting to know one another by round-about means. I only knew that when I returned my lady rose to her feet to take farewell of my mother.

For a second she seemed to hesitate, and then, stooping swiftly, she kissed my mother's pink wrinkled cheek, saying simply:

"Good-by. I will come again soon, if I may."

I felt a dazed man as I followed her out of doors.

But, had I hoped to presume upon the incident, such intention would have been successfully checked by my lady's manner; for, far from unbending toward me an iota, she turned the coldest and severest profile toward me, and by her attitude plainly said:

"Your mother is an entirely different person to you. If I choose to kiss your mother, it must give you no sort of hope that I shall ever be willing to vouchsafe like kindness upon you."

I did not attempt to presume, however; I was too profoundly grateful to heaven for the small progress made to try to hasten matters and perhaps spoil all by so doing.

What a marvelous thing is religion, thought I as I rode homeward by the side of my lady. Naught but religion can ennoble the humble and render the haughtiest spirit modest and lowly. I blessed the influence upon my dear lady of that religious household, which had so softened and disciplined her as to bring out all that was beautiful and noble in her character and efface the faults which had marred it in her youth.

My lady's coldness persisted, however, beyond that one afternoon.

It seemed as though she felt she had made herself more vulnerable by her impulsive act of condescension to my mother, and felt the necessity, in consequence, of donning a protective armor against any possible advantage I might desire to take.

She still acquiesced in my slightest wish, and made no apparent effort to avoid my company, but her manner was unresponsive and her expression grave, while the adorable dimple remained hidden away in the smooth cheek, from which no efforts of mine could coax it.

It was just at this time, at the end of the second week, that a perplexing incident occurred.

I happened to have taken a stroll round the gardens one evening, returning by a remote part which I had not previously visited. Upon rounding a corner, screened by a gigantic hedge of clipped yew, I came suddenly upon a scene which surprised me.

Seated on a circular bench beneath a wide-spreading oak-tree was my lady, and standing in front of her, with his back to me, was Masterman, the steward.

To find them conversing in so out-of-the-way a spot would have roused in me only a passing wonderment, but there was that in the attitude of them both which caught my immediate attention.

My lady was leaning forward, with her face in her hands and her elbows resting upon her knees. The evening sunlight illuminated her whole figure, and every line in her body seemed to me to denote fatigue and dejection.

Masterman, on the other hand, stood up before her, forceful and commanding, almost, I could believe, threatening. I had often been aware, myself, of the man's strong personality, but had never resented it until this moment. With an abrupt movement, my lady raised her head, and said some words I could not catch, at the same time throwing out her hands in a gesture suggestive of despair.

The instant she raised her eyes she, of course, saw

me, standing behind Masterman, in the shadow of the yew, and in her eyes, with the sun upon them, I read consternation.

But only for a moment. Rising to her feet, she dismissed the steward with a quiet air.

"That will do, Masterman. Carry out your instructions as arranged."

The man had not moved a muscle or shown in any way that he was aware of my presence. He now turned on his heel with a respectful salute, and his face wore its habitual expression of reserved decorum.

On passing me he again saluted with perfect composure.

When he was out of sight, my lady turned to me, and there was a trace of nervousness in her manner.

"Shall we return to the house, sir, or were you going elsewhere?" she asked.

"I will accompany you to the house," I replied.

Together we retreated our steps in silence, and I could sense that her nervousness increased as my silence continued. I surmised that she was wondering how long I had stood in the shadow of the yew before she had seen me, and how much of her conversation with the steward I had overheard. It was not my object to enlighten her, for, I argued, if she was in the man's power for any reason, the best threat that could be held over him would be the uncertainty of how much I knew or guessed, and he would be able to wring

from her any enlightenment she might be able to supply on that point. If, however, she too was in the dark, I certainly held the whip-hand all round.

I therefore maintained my silence until we entered the house together.

As we passed into the great hall she made some scarcely articulate remark about going upstairs, and, looking at her more closely, I was smitten to the heart to observe her extreme pallor and that her teeth were actually chattering as with cold.

Without considering my action, I laid my hand upon her wrist.

"Why, madam, you are icily cold," I exclaimed. "I fear you have caught a chill."

With a quick movement, almost a shudder, she withdrew herself from me.

"No—I—please don't touch me. I have received agitating news. I am not quite myself, so please forgive me."

She raised her eyes to mine for an instant, and I read such trouble in their depths that I cursed myself for a brute to have played upon her fears, even for her own protection as I had intended.

"Will you not trust me to help you?" I asked as gently as I could.

Another little shiver seemed to pass through her.

"Perhaps—you may be able to help—I may ask your help," she replied hurriedly, "but not just now."

With that, she turned and sped up the stairs, leav-

ing me a perplexed but not altogether dissatisfied man.

The days passed and I had no light thrown upon the little incident. My lady appeared to have recovered her composure and made no further reference to our conversation.

I was deeply chagrined, however, to notice that her manner had become even more aloof than before; she now deliberately avoided me; and, where before she had received my advances with a certain quiet dignity, she now showed such shrinking distaste that I was forced to alter my tactics altogether, and confess myself repulsed effectually. There was nothing for it but to bide my time.

One evening after my lady had retired to her room for the night, I returned to the hall, having lighted her to her room, and, pausing below a full-length portrait of the late Lord Killigew which hung upon the wall, I fell to studying it, with bitterness in my heart.

The sound of some one stirring behind me roused me from my momentary reverie. Turning abruptly, I became aware that Masterman stood close to me, his eyes also fixed upward upon the portrait.

I looked hard at the man, wondering what thoughts lay behind his calm exterior.

"There stood a gallant gentleman, Masterman," I said, raising a candle so that the light fell upon Killigew's features.

"Yes, sir," responded the steward gravely.

"It seems a strange irony of fate that he should have

come through so many great fights, only to fail at length in little more than a street scuffle," I continued thoughtfully.

"Yes, sir, it does seem strange."

I continued to gaze at the portrait.

There was something attractive about the face, though not his best friend could call Killigew handsome. His features were harsh and his complexion swarthy as a Spaniard's, but the brilliant hazel eyes looked out with dare-devil gaiety from beneath the bushy brows, and the full lips curved up pleasantly at the corners. A merry, genial gentleman, I had always heard him described, entirely lacking in foresight as a leader, but recklessly courageous, and beloved by his men for his good temper and careless camaraderie.

"Was Lady Rosamond here when the news came of Lord Killigew's death?" I asked Masterman presently.

"No, sir. My lady was staying at Tunhill Park with her uncle, Sir Reginald, at the time. But she returned to Rookherst almost immediately, to see to some legal papers and documents."

"About what date was that?" I inquired, for no particular purpose, but because the least detail of my lady's movements was of interest to me.

"It must have been about the end of March, sir. Lord Killigew was killed on the eleventh, and we received the news about a week later, when his body was found and identified. It had been thrown into a ditch,

with a number of others, but Sir Reginald obtained permission to give it decent burial."

The man spoke in his usual low, even voice, without any emotion. Although I had reason to suspect him of exercising some disturbing influence over my lady that evening I came upon them together, yet I could not bring myself to dislike him or believe him capable of doing anything really evil.

There was a quiet dignity in his bearing and a steadiness in his regard which my dealings with men had taught me to associate with honesty and fidelity.

Acting upon an impulse, I turned to him suddenly, remarking:

"It is no easy matter, Masterman, to step into shoes still warm from a dead man's feet."

He met my eyes for an instant, and to my surprise I thought I read both understanding and pity in his.

The next second he averted his gaze, and replied in an unmoved voice:

"No, sir. I should imagine not, sir. Shall I bring in some wine, sir, before you retire?"

CHAPTER V.

“THE BLUE BOAR”

I RECEIVED a summons to London early one Thursday morning, just four weeks after my wedding.

My heart sank when I perceived the official covering and seals on the packet, and my disappointment was acute when I realized that in all probability this meant the end of my leave and, possibly, my being ordered to resume my command in London.

The problem in my mind now was: if this was to be the case should I arrange for my wife to join me, or should I leave her undisturbed in her old home and trust to the probability of being able to pay her frequent visits, as it was but a three hours' journey, in good weather, from London?

I was revolving this question in my mind while leaning over the raised parapet which overhung one end of the swimming-bath. The blue-tiled bottom gave the water the appearance of illimitable depth, and, being the color of my lady's eyes, this spot had always a fascination for me.

Happening to glance now across the glittering water,

I became aware that my lady was approaching slowly along a grassy glade between herbaceous borders which led directly toward the opposite end of the baths. It was evident to me that she had not seen me, for she walked with her eyes upon the ground, and it was not until she passed within the porch of clipped yew which formed the lower entrance to the arena surrounding the baths that she glanced upward and caught sight of me watching her. She paused abruptly, and it seemed to me her first impulse was to turn back; but I checked this by calling out, “Will you come here, madam, please? I have somewhat to say to you.”

She continued her way at once deliberately, until she had ascended the steps to my side.

“I am glad you have come this way, madam,” said I, “for I have some news to impart to you. I have just received a summons to Whitehall.”

She looked up quickly.

“To London? When do you go?”

“To-morrow.”

A further question seemed to be upon the tip of her tongue, but she appeared to check it with intent. It was evidently not her object to show any curiosity in my proceedings.

“You do not ask for how long I am going,” I said. “Does that not interest you at all?”

She kept her eyes obstinately fixed upon the parapet upon which I was leaning, while she replied coldly:

"I imagine you will tell me as much as you desire me to know, sir, without my asking."

I remained silent, observing the sweeping curve of her brown lashes, darker in shade than the level golden brows, and noting the shadow they cast over her cheek. My hands rested upon the stone work before us, and I presently became aware that she was not, as I had first supposed, merely fixing her gaze downward because conscious of my scrutiny and resolved not to meet it, but that she was staring with curious intentness at my hands.

Following her gaze, I glanced down also at them, but saw nothing there to explain so intent a scrutiny. They are large hands, and at that moment were, happily, passably clean, though browned by the sun and wind.

As if suddenly becoming aware of my long silence, and as though roused by the same from a reverie, my lady stirred and looked up, meeting my inquiring, half-amused glance with a slightly embarrassed expression.

"I fear they are not aristocratic, madam," I remarked. "Suitable hands for the son of a blacksmith, but not for the husband of a peer's daughter."

Her color deepened, and for a second she looked taken aback and at a loss. Then she replied gravely:

"I think hands indicate character rather than breeding."

"And mine?" I asked, smiling, holding them out palms upward for her inspection.

She smiled also, and to my joy the baby dimple peeped forth at last.

“I think yours are big and quiet, like yourself,” she replied, adding, “They look to me good.” There was a curious shyness in her manner and tone which astonished me, and the words seemed to be uttered almost as if against her will.

“Good?” I ejaculated. “How can hands look good?”

“That I cannot explain,” she replied, with a resumption of her cool detachment. “And it is possible I may be entirely mistaken.”

“Nay, indeed I hope not,” I responded fervently. “I should like to believe you thought me good.”

“I think you were about to tell me of your movements,” she said, deliberately changing the subject. “I shall be interested to hear anything you may wish to tell me.”

“I have been recalled to London,” I replied, “but have no idea how long I may be away. If I should find I am to resume my previous command, what would you say if I desired you to join me there?”

There could be no doubt my proposition startled her.

There was actual dismay in her expression, as she exclaimed:

“Leave Rookherst, do you mean?”

“For a time—yes,” I replied, watching her keenly.

She was silent for a moment, and it seemed to me she was thinking rapidly, for there was a concentrated

expression in her eyes beneath the slightly knitted brows. Then she spoke hesitatingly:

"I should prefer not to leave Rookherst, naturally. It has associations for me." She paused, as though realizing too late that this was not the best argument to use with me; then continued in a more composed tone, with the old touch of hauteur. "However, sir, if it is your desire, I will, of course, be ready to obey it in the matter."

"In this as in all other matters," I exclaimed impatiently, letting my feelings get the upper hand for the moment, "you are verily a pattern wife in your dutiful submissiveness! I could wish you were a little less dutiful and a little more human."

She drew herself away from me.

"I think you could hardly expect more in the circumstances, sir," she said with quiet dignity.

I recognized the reproof. The thought in her mind, no doubt, was that her husband had only been dead four months; in my mind lay the knowledge that I had loved and waited for her for twenty years. But this was nothing to her, no excuse for my impatience, for my fretting desire to know her, to be allowed to get at the spirit of the woman.

She had even withdrawn of late the little comfort I had gained for myself, the small success I had achieved, or thought I had achieved. I could find no cause in myself for such withdrawal. I had never presumed. I had kept my word and given her all the

liberty, all the privacy, that an unmarried woman would have enjoyed. In return I only asked, as yet, her friendship, and an opportunity to be accorded me for letting her know what manner of man I was, that I might perchance win her confidence.

And this she now denied me, deliberately, by her coldness and aloofness and avoidance of my person.

“You say I could hardly expect more, madam,” I said bitterly. “You are right, no doubt. I suppose I could scarcely complain if you showed open loathing of me. But the grounds of my complaint are not that I have any right to expect different treatment, but that you have *already* accorded me a treatment very different. Wherefore this altered attitude? If I have done aught to deserve it, it would be only fair to tell me of it.” I paused and looked at her interrogatively.

Her delicate color deepened and she stirred uneasily.

“You have done nothing, sir,” she replied, with obvious discomfort. “You have, indeed, behaved in every way as a generous man would—but——”

“But what?” I asked, concealing my eagerness.

She made a little movement with her hand, smoothing her brow as if to clear away a troubling thought; then she looked quickly up at me, and there was a glint of laughter or of tears in her eyes; I could not have sworn which.

“If you wish I were more *human*, I, for my part, could wish you were more *ordinary*, sir,” she said. “If only you could be contented, as other men would

be contented, with—with—our marriage as it would appear to be—a bargain marriage, all would, I believe, be well. But—but—you are not. You crave what I cannot give you. Why not be satisfied with the less, and with all this,”—with a comprehensive gesture toward the beautiful garden,—“when you know you can never expect to gain the greater?”

“Never!” I exclaimed emphatically. “To the end of my life I will continue to expect the greater and never be satisfied until I attain what I crave. That is, the love of the woman I have loved so long.”

She inclined her head gravely, almost sorrowfully.

“Very well, sir; so be it. I fear we must leave it at that. My bargain included submission to your will, as your wife, but nothing more. I could wish, as I say, for your sake as well as mine, that that should satisfy you, for I both like and respect you. I am speaking, I think, humanly enough now. For your sake and because of my appreciation of your character, I could wish you demanded less, for, I repeat, I can only see bitter disappointment in store for you. It is in order in some degree also to protect myself that I warn you of this, so pray bear it in mind if in the future you are disposed to blame me too bitterly for the disillusionment when it comes.”

I smiled at her earnestness.

“I will remember, madam. I must take my chance, and I can at any rate be grateful to you for your frankness. It is preferable to deception.”

She frowned suddenly.

“I have never promised not to deceive you,” she said, with a note of sharpness in her voice.

“I am not easily deceived,” I replied, still smiling, “so I should advise you not to attempt it.”

She made no sort of retort, and for a few moments we stood together in silence, gazing down into the pool, wherein, incidentally, I got a second-hand image of herself.

Presently she asked:

“At what hour do you propose starting for London to-morrow, sir?”

“Soon after daybreak, for I wish to reach Whitehall before noon.”

“And you do not know when you will be likely to return?” she continued.

I shook my head.

“No. I may come back the next day, or I may be detained a week, or even ordered to resume duty at once.”

She seemed to hesitate, then said slowly, not looking at me:

“You remember I told you I had had disturbing news? I did not tell you what it was then, for I hoped to hear further on the matter first. It has to do with my brother, Lord Lovet. He is, I learn, very ill.”

I regarded her attentively, and she continued:

“He is, as you may know, very young, scarcely more than a boy, being only nineteen, and the strain

of his imprisonment and cruel uncertainty as to his fate have no doubt resulted in this illness. He is my only brother and very dear to me. I have, since my parents' death, looked upon him as a special charge, and it was, of course, as you are aware, for his sake I consented to this marriage. To a certain extent, therefore, you are beholden to him for the realization of this—this——” she paused, and her lips took a slightly satirical curve—“of this dream of yours. That being so, I venture to make a daring request. Should I hear further news that my brother's condition is worse and really critical, as I fear it may be, will you procure for me a pass that I may visit him?”

It was an audacious request, as she acknowledged.

“Where is your brother?” I asked quietly.

“At Cologne.”

“Madam, will you look up at me a moment?”

She raised her eyes swiftly, her color changing.

I held her clear blue eyes with mine for a minute before asking gravely:

“If I obtain such a pass for you, my Lady, how am I to be sure that you will ever come back to me?”

“I swear it,” she exclaimed eagerly.

I appeared to be satisfied.

“Very well. I will see what I can do, if you should have worse news.”

Her gratitude rather took me aback.

“Oh, thank you! I will never forget the debt I owe you, if you do this. I will——” she hesitated—“I

will do all I can to repay you—in as far as I am able, that is to say.”

I laughed aloud, but a trifle grimly.

“A promise, with reservation, I perceive. Well, madam, I hope I shall appreciate your efforts as they will deserve.”

The next morning I was up before dawn and, with my man Saunders, was mounted and ready to start for London ere the first bird's twitter broke the hush of Nature's sleep.

I knew that I could not expect my lady to rise to bid me God-speed, yet, when my man had gone ahead to open the gates, I reined in my gray just at the moat bridge, to give myself opportunity to take a lingering look at the windows of my lady's room. There was no sign of life within. My lady was, no doubt, sleeping upon her perfumed pillows, and I could picture the shower of golden hair strewn out upon the snowy linen, the dark lashes resting upon her rounded cheeks, and her soft breathing like a child's.

With a short sigh I turned me back upon the saddle, to find my lady close beside me.

She had come silently across the grass from the side of the house, and the dew clung damply to her skirts, and a gossamer web heavy with night mist had become entangled in her hair, having detached itself from some overhanging bramble.

I did not attempt to hide my joyful surprise.

"I had no hope of this, madam," I exclaimed. "Are you really here in the flesh to bid me good-by, or is it a fancy born of my own ardent desire?"

She laughed, a sudden mirthful ripple of sound which enraptured my ear; then, as though sobered by some memory, she checked herself, banished the dimple and replied seriously:

"It was only right and my duty that I should be here to see you off on your journey."

"I believe the word 'duty' is the key-note to all your conduct, my Lady," I said gently. "It is no small thing for a man to feel confident that his wife will never fail in her duty."

I spoke in all sincerity, but I was surprised at the effect of my words. I had dismounted by now and stood close beside her, my horse's reins through my arm. She turned swiftly toward me, and her face was as white as the lace at her breast.

"Do not say that—oh, please do not think so highly of me, sir! I affirm yet again that you do not know what manner of woman I am. The duty I speak of is but the perfunctory duty I owe you, nothing more. And, even if it were more," she continued with growing agitation, "there are duties and duties—one duty will assuredly clash with another in this troublous world, until in the confusion one knows not what way to take."

She looked exceedingly young and childish at that

moment, so much so that I instinctively stretched out my hand and took hers in mine, patting it as one would to console a child.

“Very well,” I said, smiling down at her troubled face, “I will endeavor to think as badly as I can of you, so that the fall of my ideal may not be too overwhelming when it comes.”

I then gently raised her hand to my lips, and she made no resistance when I pressed a lover’s long kiss upon its delicate softness.

My servant and I had almost reached the gates of the park when my attention was caught by the figure of a man skulking in the ditch by the wayside. Suspecting him to be a poacher, I called to him sharply to step out on to the road where I could see him, at the same time covering him with my pistol.

The fellow came into view, a respectable enough looking man, but clearly much alarmed at his position. In answer to my inquiries he said he was a pack driver who had just arrived in the neighborhood on his way to Maidstone from Salisbury, and, asked what he was doing on my property, he hesitated, and then explained he had been entrusted with a message to be given to a Mr. Masterman, steward at Rookherst, and that he had been told to give it to the same steward in person and to no one else, and, being in a hurry to move on his way, he had resolved to come early and catch the head steward betimes.

I appeared to be satisfied with his explanation, and

called out to my man, who was awaiting me dutifully a little distance off:

"Masterman, here is a fellow who has a love-token for you, it seems. Hasten to relieve him of it, so that we may get on."

Tossing the man a coin, I resumed my way whistling, for I felt cheerful enough.

I fear me in those days acting or speaking an untruth troubled me little. They were difficult times we lived in, and the most truly God-fearing among us often failed in spoken word or hypocritical act, because it seemed impossible to steer otherwise through the pitfalls which waylaid us on every side. To hoodwink a peddler was merely a joke to me, apart from any information I might be able to acquire by so doing.

As soon as Saunders rejoined me he handed me a small piece of crumpled paper, and it was with difficulty that I deciphered through the dirt upon it the following cryptic sentence:

The Blue Boar, Salisbury.

An address only; no signature and no name to show for whom it was intended. I was frankly puzzled.

I could not imagine the stately, dignified Masterman having any truck with the writer of so grimy a document and one who lodged in so unsavory a quar-

ter, for I was acquainted with the Blue Boar Tavern in Salisbury. I put the slip of filthy paper away carefully in my pocket-book until I should decide what to do with it.

CHAPTER VI

LAYING A TRAP

ALMOST the first person I met on my arrival at Whitehall was Major-General Lambert. He greeted me with his habitual geniality, for he was a man who laid himself out to be pleasant to all with whom he came in contact, with, I always suspected, a view to attaching people to his person and thus forwarding his own ambitions. He was undoubtedly the most popular officer in the army, and might at any moment become a serious rival to Cromwell.

I liked not the man, however, and, although I was not one of those who bowed themselves down to Oliver as a prophet of the Almighty, there was in my mind no manner of doubt which of the two men was the greater and the fitter to be a ruler.

Oliver, with all his faults, both great and small, was a born king and leader of men, magnanimous to his personal foes, indifferent to slights, which would have pierced the vanity of lesser men, with natural dignity requiring no external display, his sheer force of character making itself felt in spite of embarrassments

of speech and manner, and his very ambition, great as it undoubtedly was, ennobled because directed to the accomplishment, as he believed, of God's will, rather than to the achievement of personal aggrandizement.

Such, at least, is the man that Cromwell appeared to me, and I was by no means biased in his favor, for I had served principally under Fairfax, whom I revered for his nobility as a man and genius as a commander, and compared with whose moral transparency Oliver appeared grosser clay, though a far abler man and more complex character.

But for General Lambert I had neither liking nor respect. I read the schemer in his thin nose and quivering nostrils, and the egoist in his self-conscious eyes; nevertheless he was a handsome man, and had the charm of manner and deportment which comes of good breeding, and for the which I envied him.

"Ha, General, well met!" he exclaimed heartily. "I thought you were honeymooning in the wilds of Surrey. How goes it with the beautiful Lady Rosamond? Lucky dog to have captured so fair a prize!"

As he spoke I recalled to mind a rumor that he had desired the hand of my lady for some relative of his own, but that Oliver had refused to help on the suit, possibly doubtful of his loyalty as it was, and having no desire to add to the influence he already had by any additional aggrandizement of his family in position or property.

This knowledge made me cautious in my reply, but

Lambert appeared not to observe my reticence and merely clapped me upon the shoulder in friendly fashion, saying:

"Well, well, it is early days yet, and of course Lady Rosamond has been only recently bereaved of her first husband. I met her many years ago, and thought her a charming and accomplished woman, and of uncommon loveliness also. They said in those days she had an imperious will, and ruled Killigew, impetuous spirit though he was, but since then I believe she has altered considerably, which will be all for the better for you—though I could not conceive of you being ruled by any woman, Williams, or, indeed, of your ever being in love, man. I think I have never heard you utter more than a half a dozen consecutive words at any time, except when haranguing your troops."

He looked at me smilingly but with some curiosity.

"Tell me, though, what brings you to London?"

I could truthfully answer that I did not know, but was there in obedience to orders. Lambert knit his brows for a moment in thought.

"I wonder," he said reflectively, "if it is on the same wild-goose chase that has brought me up. That old grandmother, Secretary Thurloe, is forever scenting plots and risings, and very useful they are for fixing Oliver in his place, the panics they cause rendering all peaceable men his stanch supporters. Now the new rumor is that Charles Stuart is in hiding somewhere over here, and I suppose Thurloe and his under-

lings will work that for all they can, until the city and country are seething with excitement and consternation, and ready to empty their pockets into the government coffers for the safety of the state. Personally I am heartily sick of it all—as must be all honest men.”

He glanced sidelong at me to see, I suppose, if he could detect any sympathy or interest in my face, but I fancy my stolid regard baffled him, and in his mind, I have no doubt, he put me down for a heavy plowman turned soldier by a freak of circumstance, and not worth further effort.

Soon after he left me I was sent for to the secretary of state's room, where sat Mr. Secretary Thurloe.

I had always found Thurloe a grave, pleasant man, reliable in all his methods, and in any matter with which I had had dealings with him I had been impressed by his sagacity and foresight.

He greeted me kindly.

“His Highness will be here presently, General,” he said. “In the meantime, I can explain the reason for sending for you so summarily. You must know that it was intended by the Royalists in the recent rising of March last that, should their plan be successful, Charles Stuart should be prepared to cross immediately and raise the royal standard in person. Happily the insurrection, as you know, proved entirely local, and practically no blood was shed, save at South Molton, where Lord Killigew, by the way, met his death. Now, the part I wish to emphasize is this: The

Stuart, accompanied by the Marquis of Ormond and others, traveled in disguise from Cologne to Middelburg to await the turn of events. This much we know. From that point the movements of Charles are uncertain. Ormond, we know, returned in due course to Cologne, and our agents were constantly informed that Charles accompanied him, but the fact remains that from the day he arrived in Middelburg to the present hour none of our most trusted spies have actually seen him in person. During the last fortnight a curious tale has reached us, which may or may not have substantial grounds. One of our paid men serving us in Devon—a most faithful spy—arrived here in great haste, fairly bursting with excitement and declaring he had actually set eyes upon the Stuart himself, but had let him slip. It seems his suspicions were roused in connection with a lonely cottage near South Molton, the inmates of which he believed were concealing a Royalist refugee from the recent affray. He hung about the cottage for some time, and at length managed to climb up to a window and peep through, unnoticed as he believed. Upon a bed lay a man, evidently very sick, probably from a wound. And that man he declares was Charles Stuart. He swears he saw his face plainly, and gazed his fill, for the man lay sleeping. Charles has an uncommon type of face, there is no doubt; being in bed, of course, his unusual height could not be identified; but our man is convinced he could not be mistaken. Unfortunately

either the stranger was not so sound asleep as he appeared, or else our man's movements were observed from without; whatever the reason, when he led a body of troops there the next morning, the stranger had gone, and the cottagers swore they had had no one but themselves there, and showed him a heavy lout, their son, as the occupant of that particular room.

"We had the countryside scoured and the roads to the coast, in particular, well guarded, but no information could we obtain of any sort of this supposed refugee.

"Now I come to the part affecting you, General, and I give you the facts with diffidence, for it appears so slight a hook to hang a puzzle upon. However, we cannot afford to ignore even a hint of a clue. A few days ago, a man was arrested upon the road near Salisbury. There had been a foul murder committed in the neighborhood upon the highroad, and this man was suspected of being one of the band of rogues concerned; but upon being examined, and his person searched, he was proved to be entirely innocent of any connection with the bandits, and no further notice would have been taken of him, but for the discovery of a letter which roused the curiosity of the magistrate enough for him to send it to us, the man being detained under pretext of further inquiry. Here is the letter."

The secretary paused and turned over a paper upon his table, handing it to me. I read as follows:

To Mr. Masterman,
Steward at Rookherst Place,
in the county of Surrey.

Dear and respected sir,

Regarding the footman of whom I wrote to you some time back. I have despatched him to you as arranged, and he should reach Rookherst in due course. His journey may be interrupted owing to the unfortunate accident I mentioned to you in my last letter, wherein his face became so severely burnt. The poor fellow as near as possible died, and is still really unfit to travel save by slow stages. If you could arrange to send coach to meet him at Winchester I should deem it a kindly act, for I do declare he is worthy of this consideration, for I can heartily recommend him as a faithful servant, and very deft and efficient in his duties.

I remain your obedient and most devoted servant,

HENRY GREY,

Steward to Mr. Porter.

The writing was in an educated hand—no worse than the generality,—and easily read.

I noted the letter was dated July 26, just four days previously.

I returned it to Mr. Secretary Thurlow without comment.

He gave me a keen glance.

“What is your opinion of it, General?”

“Well, it appears to me to explain itself, sir,” I returned.

He nodded.

“Yes, on the face of it, it seems a straightforward recommendation of a man-servant from one steward to another,” he said. “What about this footman? Are you requiring a footman?”

My thoughts sped to Job Forster.

“I believe so,” I replied. “I leave such matters in my steward’s hands, but I know that a footman was dismissed my service some few weeks ago, so that no doubt my steward, Masterman, has taken steps to procure another man in his place.”

Thurloe folded up the letter and replaced it with others in a pile upon his table.

“I am inclined to agree with you that this is quite an ordinary letter of innocent nature,” he said. “The only reason it roused any suspicion at all was that it was found so carefully sewn up in the man’s saddle-bag, and also that it bore no address upon it; but that might have been an omission from sheer carelessness. The bearer, on being questioned, admitted that he had been well paid to deliver it personally into the hands of a Mr. Masterman, head steward at Rookherst, but asserted that he had had it given him by a stranger on the road not far from Taunton, in Devon. He said he was employed by a firm of wine-merchants and accustomed to travel from town to town, and explained his reason for hiding the letter in his saddle-bag was fear of contravening the law which forbids any but recognized carriers and personal servants to convey

letters. According to the magistrate, the man appeared to be speaking the truth and to know no more about the letter than what he said."

I listened attentively, my wits keenly alert, for I began to scent trouble ahead. This was clearly the second letter which had been dispatched to my steward, as a previous one was referred to. I recalled the scene I had witnessed beneath the oak-tree one evening. The date would have been about the fourteenth, and that might have been about the date the first letter would have reached Rookherst. If that letter conveyed, by means of a code, information regarding the king and possibly a demand for refuge and protection for his royal person,—if, I say, such an incredible thing could be possible,—it would be enough to cause my lady her agitation, and I could well imagine Masterman asserting his strong will over hers in his zealous fidelity to the royal cause.

My mind ran swiftly over these points, and then came back as swiftly to the utter incredibility of such a flimsy web of suppositions.

I laughed out suddenly both at myself and at the grave-faced secretary.

"If we begin to connect letters of this sort with every unsubstantial rumor which hangs about the Stuart's elusive person, there will be no end to the literature that will inundate your office, sir, it seems to me," I said apologetically.

Thurloe smiled pleasantly.

"Quite so. I agree with your view entirely, General. In any case, when this much-praised footman arrives, you will see for yourself whether it is the Stuart, and if he does not turn up, you will be in the position to suspect a code, and will then of course report to me."

Just at that moment Cromwell entered the room, accompanied by his son Henry and Major-General Sir John Preston.

The protector nodded familiarly to me; and, flinging himself down negligently upon a couch near the window, he picked up a cushion, and, without any warning or the slightest change of expression, pitched it with precise aim at the smooth head of his secretary of state.

"Say, Thurloe," he exclaimed jovially, "has that knocked some sense into your brain? or are you still seeking a royal needle in a haystack?"

The secretary picked up the cushion from the ground, where it had fallen, and placed it tidily upon a chair; smoothing his disordered hair, he then turned to his chief with a little smile on his calm face.

"I shall still seek the needle, your Highness, in case it should prick you when you least expect it."

Cromwell broke into a hearty open laugh.

"Neatly replied, upon my word! Have you recounted the whole tale to General Williams?"

"Yes, sir, I have given the general a full account, and he is inclined to think with you that the letter

is of an ordinary nature. I therefore propose to return it to the messenger to be delivered in due course at its destination at Rookherst."

"If the Stuart is in the country, he will find it mighty hard to get out of it again, it seemeth to my judgment," commented Cromwell dryly. "By the way, Williams," he added, glancing pleasantly across at me, "you will be pleased, no doubt, to learn that you are to be given the Surrey command, which will permit of your making your headquarters on your newly acquired estate."

I was indeed elated at this piece of news, and was in the act of duly expressing my thanks when the door opened abruptly and an apparition appeared before our astonished eyes, which fairly took my breath from me.

A woman, stark naked, stood in the doorway, looking round from one to the other of us with wide, brilliant eyes. Without a word, she came swiftly forward, straight to where the lord protector still reclined upon the couch, and, before a man of us could raise a hand, she had deliberately spat in his face, crying out in a high, strained voice:

"Behold, I have been commanded by the Spirit to come as a sign unto thee, O vain man, thou fallen prophet of the Lord! Even as I stand stripped of all adornment, so shalt thou be stripped of all the power and greatness thou hast clothed thyself with, and even as I have spat upon thee shall thy person be scorned, and thy name execrated, because thou hast sought glory

for thyself and forgotten to humble thyself before the Lord Almighty."

The protector himself was the first to cope with the situation, for we all stood like dumb fools, open-mouthed and staring.

Withdrawing a handkerchief from his doublet, Oliver quietly wiped his cheek; then, with no sign of irritation or hurry, he rose to his feet,—a big, bulky man,—towering over the now abashed, shivering creature; with one deliberate movement he picked up his own scarlet cloak from the back of a chair and wrapped it round the maiden, for she was little more than a maiden in years.

"My poor child," he said gently, "you have yet to learn to try the spirits whether they be of God or of your own untaught imagination. Mark my words, the Spirit of God leadeth not to eccentricity, but to soundness of mind and health of body. If there is aught in your warning that may provoke me to further heart-searching and humility, I pray God it may conduce to my good and His glory. For your part, recall to mind how our Lord dealt with the man of old who, like you, sought to throw away conventions and was a rebel against law and order. His neighbors, on their return, found him a reformed man, *clothed* and in *his right mind*, and we may well believe he became a model citizen and a valuable member of the state. So, my child, may you become. Preston, take this lady and find some respectable serving-woman on the premises

who will fit her out with clothing and give the woman this piece of money to keep her mouth shut, with a warning that if the story leaks out through her she will lose a good situation. I would not have this poor child ridiculed. Send her home by coach."

The officer had scarcely closed the inner door upon himself and his charge when there came a loud knocking upon the outer one, the entrance leading into the gallery. Believing this would prove to be some development of the scene just enacted, we all turned expectantly as, in response to Thurloe's call, the door opened.

But this fresh interruption was of an entirely different nature. Four sober-faced divines now entered the apartment, and, after solemnly saluting the protector and his secretary of state, advanced with great dignity toward the former.

Cromwell was still standing, and he now moved deliberately to a position behind Thurloe's table, where he stood, with steady gaze directed upon the newcomers.

I found it difficult to connect this stern, rock-like figure with the man who had a few moments before been lolling ungainly upon the couch, throwing pillows at his subordinate.

The four ministers lost no time in explaining their business. They had a grievance which they laid before the protector with every sign of confidence in the justice of their cause and determination to see it reme-

died, with even a hint of threatening should the head of the state fail in his duty toward them.

Their complaint was that certain preachers of the Quaker sect had set up street pulpits here, there, and everywhere, and were drawing away multitudes from the churches administered by themselves and other Presbyterian clergy.

Cromwell listened to their tale in silence; when they finished he inquired gravely:

“Do these preachers teach wrong living or any mischievous morals subversive of order?”

The Presbyterians exchanged doubtful glances, but being honest men, though narrow, they had to admit this was not so.

“Then,” said Oliver simply, “my only advice to you, sirs, is so to preach the gospel yourselves as to win back the congregations you appear to have lost by your lack of fervor and spirituality, and to add to them; for it appears to me it were better to win new converts than to waste time in wrangling over the number already under instruction.”

With this home-truth the quartet had to retire, satisfied or not as they chose. When the door closed upon their dejected backs, Oliver turned to us with a little humorous smile.

“Strange that such worthy and truly God-fearing men can undo the good they would do by these petty squabbles,” he said thoughtfully; after which sole comment he turned to Thurloe and plunged into an affair

of state which did not concern me; upon which I took the hint and withdrew, my respect for the protector greatly increased by the little incidents I had witnessed. Here was a man without affectation, secure in his own greatness, with the confidence born of self-knowledge, and that absence of self-consciousness which comes from submerging petty vanity in larger interests. A man who could be familiar to buffoonery and yet as regal as an emperor with equal ease and naturalness. A great man indeed.

It was not until I had left the palace that I remembered the slip of soiled paper in my pocket-book. I was glad I had not recalled its existence before, for it might have embarrassed my manner and given the impression that I knew more than I cared to own.

“The Blue Boar, Salisbury.”

The footman of irreproachable character was to be met at Winchester, according to the intercepted letter. I determined to put it to test if there was any connection between the servant traveling to Winchester and the unknown individual at the Blue Boar.

Stopping at a book-shop in Paternoster Row, I entered and purchased a pamphlet—almost the first my eyes lighted upon; it happened to be a treatise by an eminent scholar upon the education of children, entitled “The Reformed School,” by John Dury. With a grin I slipped the torn scrap of paper between the front pages, and that evening posted the packet to my

friend, Masterman, disguising my handwriting. I could imagine the amazement of the worthy steward when he read the title upon the frontis page. Horses, cows, or pigs he might have been interested in—but children! Well, I should see, anyway, what happened.

CHAPTER VII

THE NEW FOOTMAN

I RETURNED to Rookherst the next day, and encountered my lady in the rose-garden. She was dressed in black, as was her wont, being still in deep mourning, but at her bosom she wore a great scarlet rose, and her cheeks vied with it in color, when she saw me approaching.

"You have come back—soon—sooner than you expected," she said, and her voice faltered slightly.

"Sooner than *you* expected and hoped, my lady," was my unspoken comment. Aloud I replied as unconcerned as I could:

"Well, yes, perhaps, though I had no idea, as I told you, how long I should be detained. Happily I shall not, after this, be required to leave Rookherst for any long period at a time."

She gave me a swift inquiring glance.

"Is that so? Then you have your orders? You told me you might be ordered to London."

"Yes, but I have now been given command in this district, and can therefore use Rookherst as my headquarters."

There was no disguising from myself the unpleasant truth that my announcement was unwelcome to her. She received it in perfect silence, her eyes upon the ground.

I felt an unreasonable anger rise up within me. I had every right, according to law, to be at Rookherst, since it was my personal property now, and I had also given her more consideration than she had any reason to expect, yet she made me feel I was an unwelcome guest, allowed there upon sufferance only, and my departure hoped for.

I was tempted to show my irritability, like a boy in a huff, but maturer wisdom prevailed, and I remarked quietly:

"I thought perhaps you would be glad, in one sense, since it will at any rate not necessitate your accompanying me to London."

Oh, the curious nature of woman! Instead of giving me a grateful glance, a decided frown puckered her golden brows.

"I think I should have preferred to have got away from Rookherst for a while," she replied contrarily. "But no matter. We appear to be just the playthings of chance sometimes."

The bitterness in her tone went to my heart. My poor lady! Chance, or Fate,—or could it be Providence?—had indeed dealt strangely with her.

It was a few days later that Masterman came to me, and with his usual formal and respectful manner in-

formed me he had procured a suitable footman to take the place of Job Forster.

"He seems in every way an excellent man, sir," he explained. "He has been recommended to me by a friend of mine, the head steward in the family of a Mr. Porter, in Devonshire. Upon Mr. Porter's death the establishment has been broken up, and my friend is anxious to find a situation for this man."

"Devonshire is some distance away," I remarked. "What part of Devon is it?"

"North Devon, sir, not far from Taunton."

"Very well, Masterman," I said carelessly, "since he seems to have good recommendation, engage him, by all means. I leave this kind of business to you, you know."

"Thank you, sir; very good, sir." He hesitated a moment. "The only difficulty, sir, is that the man appears to have had some sort of an accident recently. Mr. Porter, it seems, was interested in chemicals, and during some experiments a phial containing some inflammable stuff blew up and scorched this servant's face—disfiguring him considerably, I should imagine."

"Does it incapacitate him in his duties?" I asked.

"No, I think not at all, from what my friend says, sir, but unfortunately it came upon the top of another misadventure. While accompanying his master upon a journey—the footman running beside Mr. Porter's horse—they were set upon by robbers, and in the scuffle Picard, that is the servant, was wounded in the neck.

According to the steward, he is still weak from the effects of this, but the weakness is not likely to be permanent."

"Poor fellow," I commented gravely. "He appears to have been very unlucky. You had better send a coach to meet him, Masterman, so as to convey him here in some measure of comfort."

"Very good, sir; I will do so, sir."

"How will you do so, though?" I asked. "You do not know, I suppose, where he is by now, if he is on his way?"

"Yes, sir; he is at Salisbury, awaiting further instructions."

I nodded. "Well, better send a coach there, Masterman. If he is a good servant he will be worth consideration."

Masterman saluted me respectfully and withdrew, while I sat down to think.

The footman and the writer of the anonymous message were probably, then, one and the same person. The plot thickened.

Yet it could be hardly conceivable that Charles Stuart should be about to walk into my hands in this manner. On the other hand, as Cromwell had remarked, if Charles was in the country he would find it mighty difficult, in spite of the number and variety of his sympathizers, to get out again, with every port guarded, every big town riddled with spies, a price of a thousand pounds offered for his capture, and his

face, figure, and description known in detail to the smallest village child. Only by a ruse of so daring a character as to be thought beyond conception could he hope to get away. Here, laid out before me, was just such a stratagem, which might be successful if the actors were bold enough and courageous enough to carry it through.

But was it so? I should soon know; for no disguise, however cunning, could cut off several inches from a man's height, and the man Charles stood two yards long, a great drawback to him in his adventurous life.

The footman arrived in due course. I was out riding when he reached Rookherst and so did not witness the return of the coach with its occupant.

Masterman, however, came to me later with a grave face.

"The man Picard has come, sir," he said. "He is a sicker man than I expected, and I thought it advisable to despatch him at once to bed."

I eyed him reflectively. It is easy to hide inches in bed.

"That is unfortunate, Masterman. What is the matter with him now? Not the plague or smallpox, I hope?"

"Nothing of a malignant nature, sir. As far as I can judge it, it is just extreme weakness. I have put him in a room upon the ground floor, formerly

occupied by the cook, who has moved to the attics. It seemed more convenient he should be there, if he is to be waited upon."

I nodded affably. "Well, that is your affair, Masterman. Personally, I was under the impression it was a footman you required to help you, but if you prefer a patient to nurse, every man to his own taste."

My steward made no reply, but I thought I detected a momentary uneasiness in his expression.

"Would you care to see him any time, sir?" he asked respectfully.

"Yes, I might do so now. I will come with you."

It was with lively curiosity that I made my way to that wing of the house occupied by the kitchen and servants' premises.

The room assigned to the new man-servant stood opposite the kitchen, at the end of a passage. On our way through the hall I encountered my lady entering from the garden. She glanced from one to the other of us, and I answered the question in her eyes.

"I am going to interview the new footman, madam, who has arrived this afternoon to take Forster's place. Masterman tells me he is sick."

"Indeed? I hope it is nothing serious," she replied quietly. "Can I be of any assistance in preparing cordials? Let me know, Masterman."

Her manner was perfectly composed, and her eyes as clear as a child's. I smiled a little ruefully to my-

self as I followed my steward down the passage. My lady, then, might, it seemed, be a better dissembler than I had believed her capable of being.

The room into which I was ushered by my steward was a small apartment, mean and bare enough in its furnishing, but otherwise light and airy.

Lying upon the bed, covered with a thin blanket, for the day was warm, was my new footman.

As we entered, he turned his face toward me, and made an effort to sit up, upon seeing me.

I checked this, however, peremptorily, for one glance convinced me the man, whoever he was, was very ill. I approached close to the bedside and gazed down at him attentively. He appeared to be a man of between thirty and forty, for his hair was untouched with gray and of a deep auburn shade. His mouth and chin were partially concealed by a beard and mustache of the same color—the beard trimmed to a point. The extreme pallor of his thin cheeks was accentuated by the fact that where his eyebrows should have been the skin was raised and inflamed to an angry red color. He had neither eyebrows nor eyelashes, both having been singed away, obviously, by the accident to which Masterman had referred. An unprepossessing figure of a man to have about as a personal servant, was my inward comment.

When the man's eyes met mine, however, I changed my mind, for his eyes were beautiful, in spite of the disfigured lids. They were bright and dark and intel-

lignant, and had something of the wistful appeal in them one sees in dogs' eyes—only a dog has no humor in its eyes, and these eyes might have humor mingled in their mute appeal. I could not have sworn they had not, at any rate.

"Well, Picard," I said at length, "that is your name, I understand. I see you are quite unfit to take up your duties yet. You had better make up your mind to rest here and regain your strength until such time as Mr. Masterman thinks fit. You will, of course, be under his orders."

"Thank you, sir. You are most considerate, sir," replied the man in a low, husky tone. "I will make my best endeavor to recover as quickly as possible, and am exceedingly sorry to have arrived like this."

His manner seemed sincere enough, and I left the room much puzzled.

If it was Charles Stuart, it was difficult to detect the disguise. His eyes haunted me, however. They had the Stuart beauty.

The remaining fortnight of my leave passed all too quickly. I had now spent six weeks in my lady's constant society, and on reviewing those weeks I found I could divide them into three distinct phases, according to my lady's conduct. First, the commencement, when she treated me with all the pleasant impersonal courtesy and tact of a perfectly trained hostess; then the period when for no cause that I could account for she withdrew herself from me with what almost ap-

peared to be nervous aversion, rendered the more perplexing by softer impulses when, as though against her judgment, she would show me unexpected kindness.

The last phase was even more bewildering. The best description I can give of her bearing was that she acted as though a load had been lifted from her mind. Her step was light and her expression cheerful, and her manner toward me day by day grew more friendly.

I confess I sunned myself with much contentment in this new warm atmosphere of smiling sweetness, even though I remained watchful.

One morning my lady encountered me as I was about to enter the room I had now assigned to myself as office and study. It was on the same landing as my bedroom and almost opposite—the only drawback to it being that it faced north, toward the back of the house. I paused, my hand upon the latch, as I saw she was about to say something.

"I was wondering, sir," she began casually, "whether you procured that pass for me of which I spoke on the eve of your departure to London?"

"Yes, the secretary of state gave me the necessary papers," I replied, opening the door as I spoke, and holding it open for her to pass into the room; she accepted the unspoken invitation and crossed the threshold, being the first time she had done so, to my knowledge, since I had made the room my special sanctum.

"I have the pass with me," I continued. "It only

requires to be filled in with full description and date. Have you had further news of your brother's condition?"

"No, I have heard no more, and can but hope he is better," she replied composedly. "Letters take so long to come and go that one's patience becomes much tried."

"You would take your maid with you, I suppose?" I asked carelessly; "if it should be necessary for you to go, I mean, and of course a man-servant—Masterman, no doubt?"

She hesitated, and, I thought, avoided my casual glance.

"You might require Masterman, perhaps, sir, here. I daresay one of the other men would do; but we can decide that later. By the way, the new man, Picard, I hear, is up and about now. Masterman tells me he has recovered from the prostration of the journey and has begun to take up light duties in the servants' premises, no doubt as a prelude to his real work. Masterman appears to be satisfied with him, so far, and he is usually an excellent judge of servants."

"That is well," I returned. "I hope he will prove a good footman, as I should prefer to make no change again in the staff, unless forced to do so."

That very evening I had my first sight of my new footman out of bed.

I was seated in the large hall as the gloom of evening fell and, to catch the last shreds of light, I perused

my book in the window recess. I suddenly became aware that the candles were being lit, and, glancing into the hall, realized with a slight shock that it was the stranger, not Masterman, who lit them.

I watched the man closely from over the edge of the volume I was reading. He moved carefully and noiselessly from sconce to sconce—a well-trained servant, evidently, thought I with a grin. It had not required more than one measuring glance from his head to his feet to convince me that, whoever he was, this was not Charles Stuart. As the man approached near the window, I put down my book and addressed him.

“Well, Picard, I am glad to see you are able to begin your duties. You look the better for your rest.”

There certainly was a great difference in the man; the ghastly pallor of his dark skin was relieved by a faint color, and he looked also better fed and fatter in the face.

“Thank you, sir,” he replied respectfully. “I am most grateful to you, sir, for allowing me this time off duty. I feel much better, sir, and hope I shall give you satisfaction.”

On inquiring of Masterman later, I learned that he was much pleased with the new man.

“A decent fellow, sir, I think. He seems most willing and ready to do any duty required of him, even if outside his proper work. He is already a favorite in the servants’ hall, I hear, on account of his good nature.”

"Well, do not work him too hard at the beginning, Masterman," I said, "and give him some pomade to put on his eyebrows. I confess I object to a servant minus brows and lashes."

I was perplexed and frankly inclined to believe I had made a mistake and that here was a genuine servant, and victim of an unfortunate accident, and no disguised adventurer. After all, but for that slip of dirty paper, I should have had no excuse for my suspicion. In that case, I realized with a sigh of relief, I could relinquish my watchful attitude, and press on my suit with my lady unharassed by any doubts or incertitude.

I voiced my satisfaction by whistling cheerily as I descended the stairs the next morning. My lady, who stood awaiting me below, ready dressed for riding, looked up and, meeting my eyes, smiled.

"You appear to be very cheerful," she said.

"I have much to make me cheerful," I responded, "for have you not just smiled at me?"

"You were whistling before I smiled," she retorted.

"Yes, but you smiled yesterday and the day before," replied I, calmly.

She turned her face away, but the cheek which was toward me was very pink.

"I shall have to be more careful," she said demurely.

It was the first time my lady had been deliberately coy with me, and it was not the last. From that time onward I would not say she played the coquette, for

that would not be true, My lady had always too much natural dignity for that; but her very elusiveness was intoxicating, and with the subtle sense of a lover I felt she knew it and did not resent my increasing advances.

At my invitation she made free of my sanctum, and would often, while I wrote, sit there, reading or plying her needle, for she was a beautiful needlewoman.

It was on one of these occasions that she broached the subject of a visit to Tunhill Park.

"I would not suggest it," she said with a perceptible effort, "for I am cognizant of the wishes you have expressed on this matter, but I have had a letter informing me my aunt is unwell. She is subject to an affection of the heart. As you must know, she is very dear to me, and I should esteem it an act of great generosity on your part if you would permit me to visit Tunhill just for a few nights, to reassure myself as to Lady Lovet's indisposition."

I listened to her explanation with a new foreboding in my mind.

"Perhaps you would care to see the letter?" she continued, abstracting a sheet of paper from a purse-bag which hung suspended to her girdle, and rising from her chair to hand it to me.

It was from her uncle, Sir Reginald, an affectionate, simple letter, informing her of small details which would interest her, and ending with an apology for the fact that her Aunt Letitia was unable to add her

accustomed message in her own handwriting, being confined to bed with one of her heart attacks.

My lady watched me as I read, and there was a note of anxiety in her voice as she said:

"I feel sure my aunt would have written even a few words, if she had been able, so I fear she must be worse than my uncle implies, but that he does not like to suggest I should come to visit her on account of your expressed wishes on that point."

This seemed likely enough.

I folded the letter and returned it to her, where she stood at my elbow. Then I looked up at her.

"Madam, I am no ogre."

"I know you are not," she exclaimed eagerly. "You are one of the most generous of men, in my opinion." As she spoke, she laid one hand lightly upon my sleeve.

Her touch was a provocation, whether she knew it or not. In an instant I had swung round in my chair, and my arm was encircling her.

I felt a tremor pass through her slim body, but she did not resist me; instead, it seemed to me her soft suppleness yielded to me as I drew her closer.

"And what is to be my reward for this generosity of which you speak so highly?" I asked lightly, but with gravity at the back of my glance. "Or is it perchance to be its own reward, like most well-doing?"

She returned my glance shyly. I held her so near to me that her arm pressed my shoulder.

"Will not my gratitude be enough?" she asked.

"No, I think not."

"Well, then, sir, ask what you wish."

"What I wish is, I fear, more than you are prepared to give yet, my Lady," I said with an exaggerated shake of my head. "But I will ask you to do one thing which you cannot deny is within your power to do. If I let you go, will you tell me truly whether I have come any nearer to my goal; whether your recent kindness means anything? whether I hold even the tiniest corner of the fortress of your heart?"

A burning flush showed her confusion.

"I do not think you ought to ask me that, sir."

"Why not? Do you deny you have treated me differently of late?"

She was silent.

Then, "Please let me go," she said.

I loosened my hold upon her immediately, but she did not move.

She looked down at me, and there was a suspicion of that dimple in her cheek.

"May I go to Tunhill, sir, for a few days?"

"Yes, you may go."

"Then, perhaps, I will answer your question when I come back."

Her eyes swept my face with a flash of mockery in them, but not unkind mockery. Then, turning swiftly away, she left the room.

CHAPTER VIII

A SECOND KISS

IT was the day before my lady left me on her journey into Hampshire that the lord protector paid Rookherst a visit. He happened to be passing through the neighborhood, and stayed but a single night with me, for which I was somewhat thankful, for, easy guest though he was, with manners of familiar frankness, yet one could never forget when with him that one was in the presence of a great man, the ruler of the nation's destinies.

He arrived driving his own six-in-hand, with postillion in front, an exercise of which he was still fond, in spite of its having as nearly as possible cost him his life the year before in Hyde Park, when driving some new Friesland horses and using too severe a whip, they said.

His Highness laid himself out to be all that was pleasant and affable, and in particular did not hide his admiration for my lady, who for her part was courtesy itself. At his request she both sang and played to us, and, though her voice was not powerful, it had the sweetness of a bird's, and Cromwell, who loved music, expressed his pleasure in no stinted manner.

After my lady had retired for the night, the protector followed me to my sanctum, and, throwing himself down on a couch, remarked:

"What a setting is this place for that beautiful jewel, your wife, Williams. I had heard accounts of her beauty, but I think the reality exceeds the description. You would seem to be a fortunate man." He gave me a keen glance; then his gaze wandered round the room, resting at length upon my lady's work-box, which lay upon the window-ledge at his elbow. From the work-box his eyes sought my table and its neatly filed papers, returning again to the box, and from there to my face, with a slightly quizzical gleam in them.

"Confidential papers and a woman's embroidery form something of a *mésalliance*, do you not think, General?"

I flushed under his glance.

"I keep all confidential papers in my cabinet, your Highness."

"Under lock and key?"

"Under lock and key, sir."

He nodded, as if entirely satisfied.

"Forgive my remarks, Williams. I was only afraid lest in the husband of a beautiful woman you might forget the soldier of the state."

I bowed gravely.

"I will not forget, sir."

"By the way," he continued abruptly, "did you not

obtain a pass for the Lady Rosamond overseas, to be used in case young Lord Lovet was seriously ill?"

"Yes, sir," I replied promptly. "I have it here."

"Then your wife did not require it?"

"No, your Highness. She is still awaiting further news of her brother."

"You may reassure her on that score from me, then, for I have had recent news of Lord Lovet. He was dancing a reel before Charles Stuart quite lately, and in the best of health."

"Then Charles has reappeared?" I asked, thinking of my footman.

"Oh, yes. Did not Thurloe inform you? That bubble has been burst. Our man in Devon must have been drinking, and saw the Stuart's saturnine features in the first lout he set eyes upon. I suppose your footman arrived in due course?"

I smiled at the recollection of my suspicions.

"Yes, sir. He appears to be an excellent servant, as I informed the secretary of state, and is wanting four inches at least of the Stuart's length."

At that moment the man under discussion himself appeared, bearing a tray of wine and glasses.

Cromwell watched him curiously as he arranged the tray and poured out the wine for us.

I thought the man showed signs of nervousness, but that could well be accounted for by the simple fact that the protector was one who at times inspired fear in the

breasts of even the most courageous. Picard had probably never had to serve such a celebrity before.

When he had retired, Cromwell remarked:

"Is that your new man, General?"

I assented.

"A queer-looking fellow. But, I remember now, there was some mention in that letter of an accident to his face, was there not?"

What a memory the man had for detail!

"Yes, your Highness. He had his eyebrows and lashes singed away by the explosion of some chemicals, his former master was dabbling with."

"Yes, yes; that explains his odd looks."

We parted for the night on the best of terms, and the next morning the lord protector took his departure, bidding my lady and me good-by in the kindest manner imaginable.

An hour later my lady took her departure also, accompanied by her maid, and I was left a very lonely man, with an ache in my heart.

True to her promise, my lady returned to me within a week. I had by that time taken up my new military duties, but I was at Rookherst when she arrived, and with quickened pulses came out to help her alight from the coach.

She smiled graciously upon me as she gave me her hand and suffered me to lead her indoors. There was something besides the mere fact of her presence to

make my pulses throb, for had she not said she would answer my question on her return?

I had not intended reminding her of it immediately, but she paused when in the great hall to remove her long gantlets, seemingly in no hurry to withdraw. In quite a natural manner she spoke of Tunhill and of her uncle and aunt and of the latter's health, and recounted trivial accidents on the journey. I listened, well pleased to be put on this footing, and secretly comparing this with the attitude she had adopted at the beginning.

She looked so beautiful and so fresh as she stood before me in the radiance of the window that I felt my senses reel.

She met my glance and paused in sudden confusion.

"You have something to tell me, I think, madam?" I said.

"Something to tell you, sir?" Her voice sounded startled.

"I put you a question before you left, and you implied you would answer it upon your return."

"Oh! that?" There was unmistakable relief in her tone.

"Well?"

"What was it exactly you asked?" she inquired, with an innocent air.

"I wanted to know if I was any nearer my goal."

"It depends upon what your goal really is, sir," she replied, without looking at me.

I could not restrain an impatient movement.

"Is that not quibbling, madam?"

She gave a little nervous laugh.

"I did not mean to quibble. What I mean is, are you still seeking that creation of your own fancy which you have idealized all these years, or do you really care for—for—the very ordinary person you see in front of you?"

Her words caused me a sudden shock, for in a flash I realized how dim had become the image of the golden-haired child and imperious girl of my boyish devotion, and how completely this flesh-and-blood woman, with her sweet firm mouth and clear eyes, had come to occupy my heart. She awaited my reply with downcast gaze, playing idly with her gloves, but I noticed that her fingers trembled.

"My Lady," I said, and my voice sounded husky, "your question has opened my eyes. I thought I had been in love for twenty years; I know now I have only been in love for six weeks. Will you tell me now—am I any nearer my goal?"

"I think you may be, sir," she replied softly.

I think I would have lost my head and kissed her—I know I took a step forward—but at that instant her eyes passed from my face, beyond me, and I saw the pupils dilate, while the delicate flush faded from her cheeks, leaving them strangely white.

I glanced back over my shoulder quickly, and for the moment saw nothing save the blank wall. Lifting

my eyes a little higher, I found myself gazing full at the portrait of Lord Killigew, looking wonderfully life-like, and then I read the meaning of my lady's look. The old love was contesting her heart with the new, and she was shrinking from that new force she felt gathering round her, compelling her to surrender. My sympathy went out to my lady, and it was with reverence that I raised her hand to my lips, stooping low to do so. I would not hurry her; it would not be fair or chivalrous. Yet I felt assured now that my great love for her must conquer, not to the ousting of the old affections, but by enlarging her capacity, so as to include a new passion.

Fool that I was! Little did I think how soon, how very soon I was to receive a rude awakening from my day-dreams, and be forced to recoil, as it were, from the pleasing rôle of love-smitten youth to that of a man hastily buckling on his armor for as bitter an encounter as he is ever likely to meet in his life.

Upon my return from my duties the following evening my lady met me in the hall, and her face was grave and her expression concerned and anxious.

"Have you a few moments to spare to me, sir?" she asked in her low, clear voice, but with a troubled note in it. "There is a matter of urgency about which I would speak with you."

With unconcealed alacrity I invited her into my sanctum and closed the door upon us twain.

"It concerns my young brother," explained my lady,

in answer to an inquiring glance. She held a letter in her hand, I now observed. "I fear me he is dangerously ill. I have just received this letter, which perhaps you will kindly read for yourself."

Mechanically I held out my hand and took the sheet of paper. My blood was tingling to my finger-tips, every nerve on edge, every sense alive to the new situation. In an instant my fool's peace and security had given place to an acute consciousness of trouble ahead; old suspicions were aroused, and the need of watchfulness revived with an irritating sense of their having been all too easily lulled to rest.

I studied the letter in silence, intentionally taking my time over it, in order to give myself an opportunity for re-sorting my ideas and deciding upon my course of action. The letter was apparently written by a trusted servant or attendant of young Lovet. The writer referred to his master's long indisposition—his unwillingness to inform the Lady Rosamond of the true state of affairs, with the desire to avoid causing her too great anxiety, but of having now been driven to do so by the precarious state of his lordship's health, if by any chance she could find it possible to come over to see him.

It was a plausible letter, most touchingly expressed; I could have believed it was writ by a woman!

With my eyes still upon the paper I asked quietly:

"Have you spoken to Masterman and informed him that he would be required to escort you?"

"I have spoken with Masterman," she replied composedly, "and he agrees with me that he is more required at Rookherst, in view of the fact that he can save you, sir, from all domestic concerns. He suggests my taking Picard, being a quiet, capable man, accustomed to travel abroad and speaking French well."

I turned at last and regarded her full and square.

"I believe, my Lady, I once warned you that I was not easily deceived. This letter"—tapping the sheet of paper contemptuously—"is a fabrication, originating in whose brain I do not care to surmise. If your brother has been ill at all, it must have only been a trifling indisposition soon after his release, for, if I am to make the facts tally with this effusion, I must believe that Lord Lovet rose from his bed of suffering and, in spite of bodily prostration, danced a Scotch reel in the presence of his appreciative sovereign a few days before this trustworthy servant wrote to you."

It said much for my lady's courage that, although she recoiled slightly as I spoke and her face became very pale, she still held her head high and returned my gaze steadily. I felt it was characteristic also that she made no futile attempt to carry on the deception, or to excuse it.

When I had finished speaking she said simply:

"I admit the whole story is untrue. There were grave family reasons why it was necessary I should go overseas for a short time, and I adopted this pretext to obtain the necessary facility."

I continued to observe her closely, and she flushed at something she must have read in my eyes—not contempt, for I did not think too hardly of her for having tried to deceive me. Had she not warned me she might do so?—but there are kinds and degrees of deception, and in my mind a great dread was forming itself.

“Would it not have been simpler, and more straightforward to have taken me into your confidence, madam, if it was merely a family matter?” I asked gravely.

She averted her eyes a moment.

“Yes, perhaps; but there were complications. It did not concern me alone, you see.”

“I see. Well, I fear now another method must be found to deal with this family affair,” I said coolly, turning away to sort some papers upon my table, as though the interview was at an end.

I heard no sound behind me, however, to denote that my lady had taken the hint and was withdrawing. After a moment's pause I felt a touch upon my sleeve, and, turning, I met my lady's eyes, and the appeal in their blue depths was almost irresistible.

“Forgive me,” she whispered. “I ought not to have lied to you, but the way was so beset with difficulties, and I did not know you as I do now.”

“Knowing me as you do now,” I repeated gently, “you mean you will now confide in me?”

She shifted uneasily beneath my steady gaze, though I know my glance was not unkind.

"I cannot do that," she muttered rather confusedly. "As I said before, there are others concerned; but if only you will extend your generosity even further than you have done so far,—and I, for one, am only too conscious of how great it has been already,—if, I say, you could extend it even further, to the limit of permitting me to carry out this project, I declare I will be your debtor for life, and do all in my power to repay you as you deserve."

I listened thoughtfully, watching her.

"I wonder, madam," I said at length, "whether you fully realize what you are asking me to do? Will you tell me what it is? Will you sit down?"—pushing a chair forward for her and seating myself upon another.

She looked at me doubtfully, questioningly.

"I am asking you to permit me to use that pass you have obtained for me to travel from Dover to Calais and on to Cologne."

"Precisely. That passport, I may as well mention, was obtained by me with some difficulty, for reasons which you probably understand even better than I. During the past troublous years you have, rightly or wrongly, madam, not been free from suspicion of being an active supporter of the royal cause; and in particular during the recent enterprise of March last there were rumors that the cellars of Rookherst contained something more explosive than casks of wine, and that loaded carts made their way out at midnight from your park gates. With such reports as these abroad, you

will quite realize that the secretary of state only issued that passport on the assurance that I stood security for you, and pledged the genuineness of the reason given as far as I knew it."

The troubled dismay was clear enough in her expression.

"I understand," she said slowly. "I see how difficult it is . . . for . . . for us both. But—oh, it is so important. Could you not stretch a point? It need never be known that you knew it was a falsehood beforehand. You once, long ago, did a chivalrous action for a woman you loved. Will you not earn that same woman's gratitude and a wife's devotion by once again subjecting cold duty to the nobler passion of love? See, I will carry the similitude even further. In the scene seven years ago, that woman bought her boon with a kiss, but it was a kiss of obligation. I kiss you now, Peter, not because I am forced, but freely, of mine own will."

So saying, swiftly, before I could stop her, she rose and, bending over me, pressed her lips softly upon mine.

If any one had affirmed, an hour before, that I would suffer my lady to kiss me, feel the soft curves of her lips upon mine, and be conscious of the scent of her hair in my nostrils, without a throb of my pulses, dispassionately, passively, I would have confidently called him a fool. Yet now, just that incredible thing

happened. For the second time in my life the woman I loved kissed me and received no response.

No action I could have adopted, no words I could have uttered, could have carried such a reproof as my stillness and my silence did then. If I could have kissed her, I would; if I could have spoken kindly to her, I would; but I was unable to do either, for I was held helpless in the grip of a foreboding, which laid icy fingers upon my heart-strings, so numbing them that they were incapable of any response to her appeal. In that instant the growing dread leaped into full life. My lady, then, had been playing with me, encouraging my eager pursuit for her own ends, certain that she could, when needful, demand the price and that I would pay it like a slave.

There are kinds and degrees of deception. I could forgive a lie, but not a lie hidden in a kiss.

My lady was no fool. In spite of my self-pity, I found it in my heart to pity her also, as she slowly drew herself away from me, and with a little shudder put her hands up to her burning cheeks. The rebuff must have been well-nigh intolerable to her patrician pride.

I got to my feet with an effort, for I felt curiously tired.

“Lady Rosamond,” I said slowly, and I believe my tone was gentle, if somewhat expressionless, “you must not take this to mean that I do not intend to help you

if I can do so honorably. I am a servant of the Commonwealth, and as such bound by an oath to act faithfully. I will not ask you again to take me into your confidence; possibly my hands may be less tied the less I know. However that may be, I will see what I can do with the knowledge I have. There is one point, however, I should like to be informed upon. Had your recent visit to Tunhill any connection with this family matter you speak of?"

She lowered her hands to her sides, and her figure seemed to stiffen as she returned my straight look with one equally direct.

"Yes, sir, it had." Her tone was defiant.

"And Lady Lovet's indisposition?" I asked quietly. She flashed a glance at me full of resentment.

"My aunt *was* unwell at the time, and I used that as an excuse, if it pleases you to know the worst, sir, in your desire to humiliate me."

I remained silent a second, then replied gravely: "I have no desire to humiliate you, madam. My object in questioning you is, after all, a natural one. I want to know how I stand, exactly."

She compressed her lips into a scornful curve.

"You stand holding the whip-hand, at present, anyway, sir, if it pleases you to know it, and I suppose it is a satisfaction to you to be able to repay now some of the slights and insults you suffered in the past."

An angry woman is proverbially unreasonable.

Compared to her small hurt pride, my wounded love and shaken trust were as nothing, I supposed.

"I greatly regret, madam, if by anything I have done or said I have given you any cause to believe this of me," I said quietly. "Believe me, there is no such desire in my heart. If you feel humiliated, you must admit, I think, that you brought it upon yourself."

If a look could annihilate, I should have been annihilated then. In a perfect passion of resentment, she stamped her foot in the old familiar way.

"How can I bear it? How can I meet you day after day, after what has occurred?" she exclaimed in almost childish desperation.

I raised my eyebrows with purposely exaggerated surprise.

"After all, madam, if you are referring to a recent small incident, there should be nothing so very humiliating in a wife kissing her husband."

She gave an odd little laugh, ending in a sort of sob.

"Are we husband and wife?" she asked, in a queer strangled voice. "I sometimes wonder."

"Does it seem so unreal, then?" I said sadly.

"Very unreal. Horribly unreal. The ceremony was unreal. You are unreal. Your pretended love is unreal. I am unreal. The past and present are unreal, and the future I dare not visualize!" The suppressed feeling in her tone astonished me; her face was white now, and her whole body trembled as if with

ague. I pushed a chair forward, and gently forced her into it.

"You are overwrought, my dear," I said soothingly, and in my new pity my old love and delight in her came back—she seemed so childish and fair, and the fear in her eyes roused my manhood's desire to protect her. "It is all my fault for blundering. I did not give full consideration to the fact that you must have had strong reason for the deception you played upon me. After all, too," I added with a smile, "you gave me what should have been sufficient warning beforehand that this was likely to happen; but I suppose no man likes to be fooled. Now, I will tell you what I will do. I gather from what you have told me that your relatives at Tunhill are concerned in, or at least are cognizant of, the full facts of this mysterious family matter. It appears to me that it was as much their duty as yours to deal with it, and I propose to invite your cousin, Captain Lovet, to Rookherst, that he may talk the matter over with you, and, if possible, undertake the mission himself, in your place." I paused and looked at her inquiringly.

She made no immediate response, but sat with downcast eyes, nervously twining and untwining her fingers together. Then she spoke with an effort.

"I thank you for your kind thought, sir. It is very considerate of you—very like your habitual generosity. I hardly know what to say. My relatives would have undertaken the—the business had they been able to do

so. I do not think a visit from my cousin will aid very much, but at the same time I should certainly like to be able to seek his advice."

"Very good; that is settled, then," said I cheerfully. "I will despatch a man at once with a letter to Tun-hill."

My lady rose to her feet, and as I stood holding the door open for her to pass out she gave me a reluctant glance—a doubtful, troubled look, and a little shame-faced.

After all, I thought with renewed confidence, even if she had fooled me I held the whip-hand, as she said, for was she not my wife? and, God willing, were there not long years ahead in which I should not cease to batter at the gates of her heart?

I was relieved, however, to have the apartment to myself, and glad to rest my strangely weary limbs as I gave myself up to thought.

There was not the shadow of doubt in my mind that the man Picard was closely concerned in my lady's projected journey. She spoke of it as being a family matter. That might only be a ruse to draw off my suspicions, or the man might be a relative. In either case, he was most certainly an unfortunate Royalist in disguise, attempting to evade his fate with the help of his friends. For my own part I had no wish to frustrate their plans. Ever since the abortive attempt at insurrection in the previous March, Cromwell's minions had been scouring the country for victims.

Every petty military governor and every justice of the peace had been urged by insistent letters to the utmost zeal in ferreting out suspicious characters and ordered to arrest strangers without evidence, for the mere reason that they were strangers.

About fifty or sixty brave, upright gentlemen had already paid the penalty of their folly with their lives, and more than a hundred others were even now on their way out to work as slaves in Barbados, irrespective of their social rank or moral character.

The majority of plain, temperate-minded men like myself felt enough toll had been taken already, and were not averse to giving a helping hand, where we could, to any poor wretch attempting to escape this sleuth-hound policy. As a soldier, my hands were more tied than if I had been a civilian, and I was fully conscious that I also ran far greater risks. The true personality of the refugee also would influence me; I should have fewer scruples in winking at the escape of a humble, unknown partisan of the royal house, for instance, than of one of the leaders, say Wilmot or Wagstaff.

For neither of those two gentlemen could I feel much pity. They had apparently both already escaped unscathed, leaving lesser men to suffer the penalties of their unsuccessful enterprise. I could not in my mind visualize my footman as being either of the two famed Royalist leaders, though I was unacquainted with the features of either. Lord Wilmot, Earl of Rochester,

bore no untarnished record, and his name was held in horror by every peasant in the countryside through which he had ridden his cavalry. Sir Joseph Wagstaff's conduct at Salisbury was indicative of his character, for, after having pulled the helpless sheriff and judges out of their beds, he was only deterred from hanging them in cold blood by the indignant protests of his honest supporters, Penruddock and Groves. A man who could contemplate the murder of non-combatants could expect scant pity in his turn.

Picard I could not believe to be either of these, and a Stuart he could not be.

I resolved I would see more of the man, in the meantime, and await an opportunity for helping him in his endeavor to evade justice, if justice it could be called, when I could do so with least possible risk to myself.

CHAPTER IX

THE FATEFUL NUMBER

IN addition to these disturbing domestic occurrences, of late I had been harassed by an altogether different cause, connected entirely with my military duties.

The great Model Army, as it was called, in which I had the honor of serving, was in reality a curious medley of every class and type of man, a conglomeration of all sorts of creeds and opinions, prejudices and enthusiasms.

These oddly-assorted parts had been held together by the common passions and furies of the war, the strain of long marches, fierce battles, sudden alarms, and surprise attack, but now that this unifying force no longer existed—in the leisure and liberty of peace, with discipline unconsciously relaxed—the fanatic and the rogue began to make their presence felt. The Leveler, the Anabaptist, Fifth-Monarchy man, and Millenarian each began to act upon his fervent belief of being God's one and only inspired servant, placed in the world to proclaim the truth revealed to him alone and to denounce all who opposed themselves to it in any manner whatsoever.

The lord protector had, in the early days of his rule, encouraged, for his own purposes, these unruly factions, partly, I believe, out of a sincere conviction that there were honest, God-fearing men among them,—Oliver being always a singularly tolerant man toward all religious creeds and opinions—and partly, it may be, because he found it to his advantage to play one faction against another. Later, however, he saw the necessity for suppressing the more disorderly with a strong hand.

The trouble, however, cropped up repeatedly, to the disquietude of all officers placed in any considerable command.

I had up till now considered myself extremely lucky to have been little troubled in this way, but since taking up my recent command in Surrey I had already had cause for anxiety in one of the camps—one situated near Godstone. The Quakers, with their pacifist tendencies, could have been effectually dealt with, for they were, for the most part, sufficiently law-abiding to be reasonable; the Fifth-Monarchy men and Millenarians, with their wild theories and ill-balanced ideals, would also have been comparatively easy to crush, for their visionary aims only appealed to a limited section. But the influence I found myself called upon to deal with was much more insidious and dangerous in its character and extent.

The Levelers were a body of men who had much that was sound and right in their convictions; a great many

of them were also men of high standing and moral character who sought to obtain their aims by fair and constitutional means. They claimed fair representation and equal rights of citizenship for the poor as for the rich, and the abolishing of many abuses and privileges of old standing. But though these recognized leaders were sober-minded men, the rank and file were led by men of quite other character, whose teaching and outrageous claims were wholly subversive of both civil order and military discipline, and whose appeal to the discontents and self-seeking instincts of men found ready response.

This was the mischief I had begun to scent, and in my case the difficulty was increased by the suspicion that the instigator of the trouble in this particular camp was a man who had been my companion in arms during the first years of my campaigning, my fellow and equal then, sharing my ration and my bed on many a night.

Complications of something of this nature will surely always accompany any career like mine, when a man of the people is forced up into another class of society and into a position of responsibility, where he must wield authority over his erstwhile companions; and I was prepared to meet such normal complications in a practical manner. But there was in this case a possibility of tragedy which troubled me not a little.

My difficulties were increased by the fact that I knew

I was unpopular with my own staff and had reason to suspect that information was purposely withheld from my knowledge.

My predecessor had been a man of careless and pliant character, who had permitted great latitude to his subordinates, with the result that when I took over the command I found many abuses which had to be put right and lapses in discipline which had to be corrected, to the natural irritation of the officers placed under me. These officers were also, to a man, my superiors by birth and standing, and not a few of them my seniors in age.

The days following upon my interview with my lady were not happy ones for either of us, and our gloom seemed to infect the rest of the household. Saunders, my soldier-servant, became smitten with a fever, and lay muttering incoherent prayers upon his bed; the cook cut his hand with a carving-knife, and Don ran a splinter into his paw; while my steward and my footman both wore furtive looks and carried out their duties in depressed silence. My lady avoided me as far as possible, and on occasions which necessitated our being together she was a monosyllabic companion, rarely lifting her eyes to my face and never addressing me unless spoken to first.

One morning, making an excuse of my own man's indisposition, I gave orders to Picard to accompany me, in Saunders' stead, on my daily ride to camp. I was

curious to have a talk with the man, and whether or not I roused his suspicious fears while doing so was a matter of indifference to me.

He was undoubtedly an excellent actor, and I had been able to detect, so far, no flaw in his bearing or address. He appeared to be just a well-trained servant, but, as he dutifully held my stirrup and I swung myself into the saddle, I conjectured with an inward grin whether socially our positions should not by rights be reversed.

Our road lay through pretty country, gently undulating for the first few miles amid meadowland and woods, until near Godstone, where the way inclined upward steeply to the common where the camp was situated, being summer-time.

When we had covered two miles or so I drew rein slightly for Picard to ride up to me, and addressed him carelessly:

"Have you ever been to a military camp before, Picard?"

"No, sir."

"You did not take any part in the war, then?"

"No, sir; I was a gentleman's servant, you see, sir."

"And your master, Mr. Porter, did he not interest himself in the quarrel, either?"

"No, sir. He was a scientist, sir."

"But even scientists fought."

"Yes, sir—no doubt, sir; but Mr. Porter was an old gentleman."

"I see. Pity the old gentleman managed to burn off your eyebrows, though, and that you got bulleted by those footpads. It would appear to be a good thing you did not go in for the actual fighting, as you seem to have been so unlucky even in your peaceful pursuits," I commented dryly.

The man made no response, but showed a desire to slip back to his former respectful distance in my rear. This I frustrated, however.

"Tell me, Picard, have you any relations living? Where does your family spring from?"

He hesitated a moment.

"I am partly of foreign extraction, sir. French."

"That accounts for your name, no doubt," I said reflectively. "Are you a married man?"

"Yes, sir."

"A widower?"

"No, sir. My wife is living, but we are separated."

"That is a pity."

"Yes, sir, it is," he assented gravely.

"Whose fault is it, Picard?" I asked severely.

"Nobody's fault exactly, sir. It is just due to an unfortunate situation."

"Your affections are not divided, then?"

"No, sir."

"Perhaps it is the sea which divides you?" I inquired innocently, "as you say you are partly French. Could you not arrange for your wife to join you in England, if that is the case?"

"I should prefer to join her, sir, if it could be arranged," he muttered. "But I do not want to give up a good situation."

"Quite so. I can understand that. You might be worse off than you are now, out of the frying-pan into the fire, as it were," I said genially. "But, being so happily married myself, I can feel for you, Picard, and if I can help you in any way to renew your former conjugal relations I will be glad to do so."

My footman shifted uneasily in his saddle, and gave me a sidelong glance, showing some abashment when he found my eyes fixed pleasantly upon him.

"Thank you, sir. I will remember your kind promise, sir," he replied gravely.

We rode into camp about nine o'clock, and I was conscious immediately of an atmosphere of suppressed excitement pervading the place, and kept a watchful look round me as I crossed the wide space between the roadway and my office quarters.

I walked deliberately, and, I hope, seemingly with unconcern, as was my wont, but my heart sank with foreboding of trouble afoot.

A couple of non-commissioned officers saluted me deferentially as I passed, and the men stood at attention, but with sullen, downcast looks.

At the door of my office I paused, and, turning to one of the non-commissioned officers, inquired sharply:

"Where are Colonel Thompson and Major Heasman?"

Even as the words left my lips I felt my arms pinioned to my sides and heard a loud exclamation from my footman behind me :

“Good Lord, it is mutiny!”

As if at a signal, in an instant we were the center of a threatening, muttering crowd of soldiers. The rope which had been dropped over me was tightened unmercifully, effectually pinning my arms to my sides and rendering me painfully helpless, and I was firmly forced forward into the middle of the parade-ground.

The situation began to elucidate itself as I looked round.

It was plain that my subordinates had been, whether willingly or unwillingly I could not say as yet, already overpowered and placed where they could be of no assistance to me, and that I had now to face, and deal as best I could in my present humiliating position, with as dangerous a situation as a man could well be placed in. I had no difficulty in picking out the ring-leaders in the enterprise, grim fanatics all of them, morose, wayward spirits, believing themselves to be the instruments of heaven, in reality the slaves of every undisciplined impulse of their dim, misguided intelligence. Foremost among them stood the man I had suspected. Poor fool! As I met his glance of hatred and fierce triumph I recalled the night when we had wrapped our two shivering bodies in the same blanket, and he, a fair-faced boy of seventeen, had sobbed his homesick

woes into my ear and slept with his wet cheek against my shoulder.

Since then he had successively turned Quaker and Millenarian, and was now a so-called Leveler, with a mission so to level all things that the earth should become a hideous place to live in—shaven and shorn of all motive for high endeavor, noble ambition, and desire for the bettering of mankind.

I was not kept long in suspense as to the fate intended for me.

Wilde, my old-time chum, stepped forward, and in an impassioned speech, in which his voice rose to a strained scream at times, in the frantic desire to be heard by all the great throng, and in the excitement of his unbalanced state of mind, he enumerated my crimes against society. According to him I stood for all that was evil and harmful in that age, an example of unbridled ambition, the successful adventurer and exploiter of other men's misfortunes, a man who had once known God and felt the breath of His spirit, and who had deliberately trampled upon that Holy Revelation, spurned the Gift of the High Calling of the Almighty, and turned eagerly to seek after the world and the lusts of the flesh and the ways of the devil. By making an example of me before all men, the wayward would be deterred from like paths, and the weak brethren strengthened, an impetus would be given to the cause of Righteousness, and a staggering blow administered to the Forces of Might and Ungodliness,

which now sat in high places (presumably his Highness, the lord protector).

From the chorus of deep amens and groans of assent which accompanied this inflammatory speech I gathered that the insidious influence had done its work, and that my fate could not even be said to hang in the balance, humanly speaking.

With his hands uplifted to heaven, Ebenezer Wilde pronounced my sentence amid a hushed silence.

Peter Williams, son of Peter the Blacksmith, was to be placed against a wall and shot for having arrogated to himself authority over his equals and using that authority to suppress the free intercourse of saints, and hindering the work of the Holy Spirit by the breaking up of prayer-meetings and by placing under arrest many of God's chosen instruments. For these crimes and others enumerated at some length, he was to be made a public and terrible example such as would cause other God-forsaking officers to pause and tremble, and mend their way, and give encouragement to godly soldiers everywhere to up and do likewise.

The hush which followed the last words was broken by a fierce oath behind me and the sound of a scuffle, and, turning my head, I caught sight of Picard being untenderly handled, then securely held, while a rough gag was thrust into his mouth. I gathered that he must have made a futile effort to come to my assistance, and unconsciously I registered a mark in his favor, forgetting, for the moment, how little likely it

was that I should ever again be in the position to reward him with more than ghostly help.

Happily I was myself not gagged, and, realizing it behooved me to make immediate use of this blessing, I raised my voice, but not too loud, for I had often noticed that men will listen more intently to a clear but not too high-pitched voice.

There is much in habit, and the men attended in deep silence to what I had to say.

I warned them of the folly of their action. In my place another would immediately step; discipline would still be enforced as rigidly as before, the only difference being that they personally would not be there to suffer it, for they would all, to a man, have met their doom by then.

"Men, which is better," I asked them, "to submit yourselves to the powers that be, as St. Paul exhorts, and by your orderly conduct win others to the side of godliness, or to share the fate of the marauder and the lawbreaker and so dishonor the name of Christian? Remember, God is not the author of confusion but of order and peace."

My appeal had an effect which was immediately detected by Wilde. Swinging round to face his supporters, he cried out:

"Believe him not. He but deludes you and purposes to entrap you with his wily words. The die is already cast. It is too late for you to draw back. Your fate is sealed already, as far as human wisdom goes. You

have already mutinied, and are as dead men, but God can and will protect you if ye be but courageous enough to go forward with the work. Strengthen your hands; confirm your weak knees. Let it not be said that ye put your hands to the plow and then recoiled from faintness of spirit and became a stumbling-block to the others in many places who are watching how ye will behave, and will follow your example if ye succeed. The day of the Lord is at hand, and the reign of the saints, when principalities and thrones and arrogance and pomp will all be cast down, and the humblest be exalted. We were not afraid to dip our hands in the blood of a king; shall we fear to shoot a man of our own standing, who arrogates to himself unrighteous authority?"

A fierce murmur of approval arose from all sides; the die appeared to be cast indeed. I passed my glance rapidly over the crowded ranks, and made a rough shot at calculation; then, turning negligently to one of my captors who held me, I remarked in an aside:

"The prophets of Baal were four hundred and fifty men as against one—a somewhat strange coincidence, methinks."

With the curiosity of children the men nearest me crowded closer to catch my low-toned words, and those who failed to hear them questioned suspiciously:

"What said he? Tell us what he said."

"Four hundred and fifty! 'T is the fatal number. What said he of it?"

"The prophets of Baal were four hundred and fifty," I repeated, deliberately raising my voice.

There fell a dead silence.

Unwittingly, I knew then I must have hit upon some prearranged code, and to superstitious, uneducated minds such trifles carry enormous weight.

I pressed home my advantage.

"My men," I exclaimed earnestly, "mark you my words, coincidences such as this are not without their meaning. It may be that God would have you pause to think ere you act, lest you find too late that you have followed your own self-made guidance and not His Spirit. I urge you to put it to the test. I am at your mercy. I cannot escape, and you can still carry out your will upon me at any moment; if you are, as you profess, ready to follow God's guidance alone, then ask Him for a sign as to what His will is, even as Gideon did of old. Let there be a lot drawn between Ebenezer Wilde and myself, the one of us to die for the rest, the only difference being that if the lot falls upon me that I should take my own life—I give my word that I shall do so, and by doing so no blame can fall upon any one of you, for I should have died a suicide. If, on the other hand, the lot should fall upon him, he shall be shot by my orders as a mutineer, and as an example to the rest of you, and thereby also in his turn give his life for you."

I had hardly expected such an immediate acceptance and indorsement of my proposition as came now, and

certainly not from the quarter whence it came. Without a moment's hesitation Wilde sprang forward, his face aflame with fanatical fervor.

"A sign! a sign!" he cried. "It shall be a sign from the Lord. A life given as a sacrifice acceptable to heaven."

The preparations were simple, and took little time. Two slips of paper, one blank and the other marked with a cross, were folded and placed in a helmet, the arrangement being that we were each in turn to draw out a paper, and the cross was to carry the death sentence.

My arms were unbound, while the preparations were being made, to enable me to get back the circulation to my numbed fingers. There was no real reason why we should both draw out a paper, as far as I could see; there being only two slips, one of us would have been sufficient, but for some reason there was an unanimous desire that we should both be put to the test, I fancy from curiosity to see if either of us showed signs of fear at the crucial moment of unfolding our fate.

It imparts a strange sensation to a man to look around him and note the blue sky, the fleecy clouds, trees in blossom and green grass beneath his feet, and realize that within an hour these may be blotted out for him forever. "Maybe this is my last look at that bird winging its way yonder," I said to myself; "this is the last time I shall smell that scent of pine, the last time I shall gaze upon that human face over there. It is not

a friendly face," I found myself reflecting, "but it is flesh and blood, warm and living. I have a desire to see it again. I have a desire to breathe in this warm air again, to hear that lark sing often again. But within ten minutes I may be handling the hard barrel of a pistol, deliberately pressing its cold metal against my forehead, unwillingly but irrevocably closing my finger upon the trigger, and then—God have mercy upon my soul, and accept the enforced sacrifice, but not for its worth, for it has very little merit."

"Will you draw, sir?"

With an effort of will I took my eyes from the bird I was watching with such seeming intentness, and, after bowing my bared head for a second in silence before God Almighty, I put my hand into the helmet and drew out my slip. Wilde did likewise, but his prayer was spoken aloud, if prayer it could be called, for it was more like unto a command to his Maker to do His duty as understood by Ebenezer Wilde. In tense silence we each unfolded our slips.

I had drawn the blank.

There are, I suppose, some unhinged minds which only require a great shock, a sudden revulsion of feeling, to bring them back to sanity. Wilde must have been one such as this. The instant his eyes fell upon that condemning mark, the cross convicting him, as he believed, of sin against God, he recoiled in horror, not, I am convinced, from fear of his doom, but from the course he had mapped out for himself. At that instant

he recovered his sanity and became the man God would have had him be.

His face was deathly white, and perspiration had sprung out in tiny glistening beads upon his brow and lips, but it was not with cowardice, for his eyes as they sought mine held a tragedy in them far greater than the fear of death.

We stood but a few paces from one another, and his voice, though low and strained, fell clear upon my ear.

“General, can you forgive me?”

I did not misunderstand his appeal.

“I can forgive you, Wilde,” I said gravely.

Still his eyes searched mine.

“Tell me, sir, am I a lost soul? Can God forgive me? I fear me I have sinned against the Holy Ghost.”

“I think your fear is the proof that you have not, Wilde,” I said, a great pity in my heart. “Man, thy Maker is thy Friend.”

“I know—I do know that. I do believe that,” he answered brokenly. “Thank you, General; you have always been a true friend and counselor to me. God will recompense you, even though I have proved so unworthy.”

After that he turned away without another word.

To this day an agony of pain grips me when I recall the scene that followed. I dared not spare the man; my authority rested entirely upon the force of habitual obedience reasserting itself in my men, an example

must be made. Would to God that example could have been another, and not the man I had loved as a fair-faced boy sobbing upon my shoulder.

A squad was called out and obeyed mechanically. I committed the condemned man's soul to God, for there was no minister present, and then gave the order—and he met his death like the courageous man he was.

The next step was to ascertain the fate of my staff, of those on duty, at least.

As I surmised, I found these officers had been ignominiously shut up in a hut which served as a guard-room.

These gentlemen were presently led forth, and were, I think, not a little confounded to find no murdered general, lying horrible and mutilated upon the ground, but a very much alive and irate commanding officer, who, in the privacy of his tent, vented upon their crest-fallen persons all the fret and strain and bitter stabbing pain he was at the moment enduring.

But for them, he roared, all this would not have happened; it was entirely due to their inefficiency, their crass stupidity and contemptible vanity, that things had come to this pass.

It would have been with the greatest satisfaction, he informed them, that he would have committed them to a court martial, with the assurance that they would be deprived of the commissions they had so grievously misused, but that this course was rendered impossible

by the promise he had made to his men that Wilde should be their scapegoat and the affair be thereafter closed.

It was late that evening when I set off on my return ride to Rookherst. I had left the camp quiet and orderly, and had no fears of further trouble, for I knew the canker had been cut out. I was well acquainted with the men I had to deal with, for had I not lived and fought in their midst, sat over the camp-fires with them, or their like, drunk ale from the same can, studied the Scriptures in a circle together, our heads bent over the same portion, read by the light of the moon ere we turned in for the night? Did I not know their fierce enthusiasm, blind obedience, dogged courage, and childish faith in and devotion to a belief or a person?

I knew my men, and they now knew me and had accepted me. They were *my* men, and I would have no further difficulty with them. Ebenezer Wilde had not died in vain.

CHAPTER X

PICARD'S REFLECTIONS

THERE was a clear moon overhead as we rode back to Rookherst, which was no small blessing, for after the heat of the day a mist had risen and lay belly-deep to our horses, and at times, when we rode into a dip, the cold white fog immersed us altogether and clung damp to our hair.

I had kept Picard close at my side the whole day, for I judged him to be faithful to me for his own interests, if for no other, and I knew his quick, educated intelligence would be of service if any new emergency arrived.

No such demand had arisen, as it turned out, but the common strain we had been through had drawn the two of us nearer to one another. I felt differently toward the man now, and it was with a momentary forgetfulness of our curious relations that I remarked over my shoulder:

"That was a near thing."

"Yes, a very near thing," he assented, with a similar lapse of memory. "It was entirely due to your extraordinary courage that the situation was saved," he added with conviction.

I shrugged my shoulders.

"I fail to see what else I could have done in the circumstances. Any fool about to be murdered would try to find a way out of such an unpleasant position. The number four hundred and fifty was a wonderful piece of luck, if luck one can call an interposition of Providence such as that undoubtedly was, whereby hundreds of brave men's lives were saved. One shudders to think what would have happened if those poor fools had gone on with their mad design."

"Nevertheless, I repeat you acted with a cool courage I have never seen equaled," insisted my footman with sincerity.

I smiled in the darkness, suddenly remembering how we stood.

"Thank you, Picard; your commendation is most gratifying," I remarked dryly.

The sarcasm went home.

"I beg your pardon, sir; I forgot," he said.

"Don't mention it, Picard. I forgot also. It seems mighty easy, somehow, to forget our respective positions. By the way, what opportunities have you had for witnessing those feats of courage in comparison with which mine shines so conspicuously, Picard? As servant to a scientific gentleman of advanced age I should have thought such opportunities limited."

My footman was unable to make any reply for a moment or two, the fog having entered his throat, causing a paroxysm of coughing.

When he appeared easier, I inquired again, in a pleasant tone :

“Well, Picard, you have not yet answered my question.”

He cleared his throat once more, before speaking.

“There are sometimes experiences in a man's life, sir, which he would rather were not universally known. I admit I have not told you the entire truth about myself. I took a—a small part in the Civil War, and bought my experience then.”

“On which side fought you, Picard?”

“On the beaten side, sir.”

“I see. Well, I can understand your reticence ; but many an honest man did the same and is now a loyal citizen of the Commonwealth, even as you no doubt are. Tell me, Picard : I judge by your address that you have come down in the world. Am I right?”

The man cleared his throat hoarsely again.

“Yes, sir. I have been unfortunate.”

“Ah, Picard,” I returned sententiously, “remember the saying, ‘Wine is a mocker, and strong drink raging ; whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise.’ I fear drink has been your undoing.”

My footman made no comment, but by the jingle of his horse's bridle-chain and the animal's sudden activity I judged he had inadvertently dug his spurs into the poor beast.

We rode on some distance, and my thoughts reverted

persistently to the face of Ebenezer Wilde and the haunting expression in his eyes.

"Do you know, Picard," I burst out suddenly, and I saw the man start as I spoke, "that fellow Wilde was my closest friend for two years. We were both of us in our teens. I was his senior only by a few months. For two years we ate and slept, marched and fought side by side. A man gets to know another man pretty intimately in those circumstances. We loved each other then as brothers, Ebenezer Wilde and I, and now, scarcely twelve hours ago, I gave the order for him to be shot before my eyes."

Picard met my glance. I had reined in my horse for him to come alongside.

"It was your duty, sir," he replied.

"Yes, it was my duty, certainly," I responded. "Do you, then, think duty should always override sentiment, Picard? I am curious to hear your opinion."

My companion stirred uneasily in his saddle.

"I think there might be exceptions, sir," he replied in a low tone, and with a certain trace of emotion. "But, of course, I cannot presume to judge for you."

"Of course not. I quite understand that. So you think there might be exceptions? Each case should be judged on its own merits, I suppose. As a soldier, unfortunately, one's hands are usually more tied than a civilian's would be."

"Quite so, sir, naturally," responded my Royalist footman quietly.

We rode on in silence now, each immersed, no doubt, in our own train of thought, and it came as a surprise to me to find we had almost reached the great gates leading into the park of Rookherst estate. The road takes a sudden bend here, and, being on a steep decline, it is overhung on one side by a high bank, the roadway itself being cut down to ease the gradient. It was just as we rode into the shadow of this overhanging bank, preparatory to turning sharply in at the gate on our left, that my companion's horse gave a sudden plunge forward, colliding clumsily with my mount, crushing my foot and driving my beast with an alarmed squeal into the ditch, where it assumed a sitting posture, resting upon its haunches and pawing the air with its front legs—to my extreme discomfort.

My first natural angry conviction was that this meant foul play on the part of Picard, but the next instant a shot rang out, which certainly did not originate with my companion, for I saw him stagger back in his saddle, clapping his hand to his head as he fell. Happily I was able to catch his horse's bridle and control the two frightened beasts while I dismounted.

The moon was shining out brightly at the time, and a rising wind had dispersed the mist, so that every detail of the scene was as clear as noonday. I disentangled my companion's feet from the stirrups, and drew him as gently as I could to the ground.

One side of his face was covered with blood, but a cursory examination gave me hope that it was not

a serious wound, the bullet having apparently only grazed his scalp; an inch more and he would have been a dead man.

He was fully conscious, and met my eyes with a faint smile in his.

"It is all right, sir, I think, is n't it? I am not killed, am I?"

I returned his smile. "No, I am glad to say you are not. It is only a flesh wound, as far as I can see—a deep scratch. But can you tell me what happened?" I added, glancing round the deserted roadway in a puzzled manner. "Where did that shot come from?"

"From up above us, sir. I happened to glance up as we turned the corner, and in the moonlight I saw as plainly as possible a fellow with a gun aimed at—at the road."

"Aimed at the road?" I repeated laconically. "Well, he missed his mark then, in spite of a fair-sized target. Did you see his face? Can you describe him?"

"I saw him perfectly plain. A dark, lantern-jawed fellow with a very pale face and great black eyes. He had a curiously long countenance."

The description brought Job Forster forcibly to my mind.

"Then I think, Picard," I said quietly, "I owe you my life. That bullet was meant for my head, not yours, or the road."

"I thought it might be," he replied thoughtfully. "The man looked murder."

I had bound up his head as best I could by now, and with my assistance he was able to remount his horse, swaying rather dizzily, however, in his seat.

"Look here, man," I said peremptorily, "put your arm upon my shoulder, thus, and I will put mine round you so; that will keep you steadier. We have not far to go, luckily."

"That fellow," I explained, as we made our slow progress, "was the former footman here. I discharged him for misconduct and unwisely let him go with a warning only. You stepped into his shoes, Picard. It does not, it seems, pay to be too merciful, gratitude being a rare virtue. What do you think, Picard?"

He met my glance again this time with a whimsical smile, though his face was pale with suffering.

"I think, sir, that my opinion is really not worth having, but, as you ask it, my experience is that gratitude is not so rare as you think, and is to be met with in unexpected quarters. It is worth while being merciful on the chance, anyway."

"Perhaps," I replied, "but in this particular instance I nearly paid heavily for my gamble. As I said before, you saved my life, which means, by the way, that the gratitude must be on my side. You must let me know what I can do for you, Picard, when you are recovered enough to think on it."

"Thank you, sir. It is very good of you, sir," he replied, for all the world like a perfectly trained servant.

I admired the man but devoutly wished he was safely off my hands. It was principally in order to accomplish this object that I had invited Captain Lovet to Rookherst. With any luck I should be able to shift the responsibility on to that gallant officer.

We had hardly entered the avenue before we were met by a party of men hurrying from the house, headed by Masterman himself.

By the flickering, swaying lights of the lanterns I could see the steward's face was pale and his expression strained and anxious.

"Thank God, sir, you are safe," he exclaimed, and the sincerity of his tone touched me considerably. "We have been out in all directions, searching for you, and the sound of that shot filled me with misgiving. My lady has been in a terrible state of mind about your safety, sir," he added significantly.

"Poor Masterman! Loyal soul," I thought to myself. "He wishes, at least, to make things appear well outwardly before the servants." Aloud I replied:

"Thank you, Masterman, for your concern. I am all right myself, but, as you see, Picard has been a bit damaged. Get a couple of men to help him to the house and put him to bed. I will explain what has occurred as we walk back."

My lady met me at the entrance to the big hall.

Masterman was just behind me as I entered, and I saw my lady's glance pass from one to the other of us anxiously, questioningly; then the steward went on

his unobtrusive way, and I was left alone with my wife.

"I am so glad you have come back safely," she faltered, her color changing painfully. "I was beginning to feel so anxious, and I hardly knew what to think when I heard that shot."

Had I not been undeceived so recently my pulses would have quickened considerably more than they did as I looked into her eyes at that moment. I could have sworn she had been crying.

"I am truly sorry, madam," I said somewhat coolly, "to have been the cause of any anxiety to you. As a matter of fact, I have had a narrow escape, but the bullet that was intended for me shot Picard."

I regretted my brutality immediately, for her cheeks blanched in an instant, and with a little cry she recoiled a step.

"Shot him! Do you mean he is dead?"

"No, not dead—not even in danger of dying. Mercifully, the bullet only grazed his scalp. I must say," I went on, with the desire to make conversation, and thereby give her opportunity for recovering her composure, "I must say that man Picard is about the most unfortunate individual I have ever come across. He seems positively to attract bullets and combustions to himself like a magnet. By all the laws of nature he should be a dead man by now."

With an odd little inarticulate sound my lady abruptly sank into a chair. I saw a spasm pass over her face; she made what appeared to be a violent effort to

control herself, but unavailingly, for the next instant she was rocking to and fro in a paroxysm of helpless, hysterical laughter.

I stared at her, dumfounded, and I suppose my amazed expression only served to provoke her further, for she pressed a handkerchief to her streaming eyes, exclaiming in a muffled voice:

“Don’t—please don’t look at me like that. I can’t help myself. It is horrible—incredible that I should laugh like this at—at—such an awful tragedy. It must be the strain of it all—or else I am going mad.”

With which strange words she abruptly sprang to her feet and literally fled from my presence.

CHAPTER XI

CAPTAIN LOVET'S VISIT

THE day following the preceding incidents brought my messenger back from Hampshire with a reply from Captain Lovet to the effect that he would be happy to avail himself of my invitation and would lose no time in visiting us at Rookherst. The same day also saw the capture of my old enemy, Job Forster.

I had formed the men of the camp at Godstone into search-parties, instead of putting them all in detention, as was clearly my duty; but the effect was healthful, and, judging by the boyish enthusiasm with which they set to work and their triumph in catching my would-be murderer, no one would have conceived that twenty-four hours previously they had themselves to a man been bent upon my destruction.

Within a few months Job Forster was engaged in growing tobacco in the West Indies by the side of many a better man than he, and I was troubled with him no more.

My soldier-servant, Saunders, had happily taken a turn for the better, but the fever had left him weak,

and as he was still confined to his room, I visited him occasionally to see how he fared. Upon one of these visits I paused before entering his room, because I could hear that he was engaged in prayer. It was from no delicacy of feeling that I hesitated on the threshold, for Saunders, like other martial saints of his type, would have felt no shyness about praying aloud in my presence.

Throughout his campaigning experiences he had been accustomed to take part in camp prayer-meetings, where he and his companions would in turn, or simultaneously, pour out their souls in fervent, passionate prayer, irrespective of their rank or social standing, officer and non-commissioned officer and ranker all together, bareheaded, in the presence of God, and this in the most disciplined army in the world. It was a religious age we lived in and, far from hiding our beliefs, we were too apt to parade them with a baldness and lack of reserve which gave an opportunity to the scoffer to caricature and to the hypocrite to counterfeit.

It was therefore not the fact that my servant was praying aloud that made me pause, but the substance of that prayer, as it reached me through the closed door.

“Lord, give light to Thy servant; let him not be dazzled by the light of a woman’s eyes. Guide Thy servant in that plain path where the wayfarer though a fool shall not err, and let me not be enticed by the lust of the flesh. This woman is fair, Lord, but I fear me

she is worldly; show me Thy will; shall I love her, or shall I forbear?"

Poor Saunders was clearly in trouble, the same old trouble that I was familiar with, and I could feel for him. My curiosity was roused, however, so I opened the door and walked in: I found my stalwart manservant upon his knees beside the low bedstead, and as he raised his face I saw it was pale with physical fatigue and mental strain.

"Come, come, Saunders," I said, shaking him gently by the shoulder, "you will soon be beyond the enticements of any feminine charms, if you do not get back to bed. You have got the fever on you again, man."

Obediently he got back into his bed, showing no resentment or confusion at my words.

"Well," I continued, seating myself at the bottom of his couch, "who is the lady, Saunders?"

"Privet Joy, sir. My Lady Rosamond's maid," he replied, without hesitation, but in a hopeless sort of tone.

"Ah, yes, a pretty creature—but, I fear, a bit of a minx, Saunders," I said thoughtfully. "How far has the matter gone?"

"I am asking God's guidance, sir," he replied evasively.

"Then you have not fallen in love with the lady yet?"

"Yes, I have," he blurted out vehemently.

"Then, man, why don't you ask her?" I suggested.

"I *have* asked her, and she has rejected me," he replied with dogged honesty.

I checked an inclination to laugh.

"Well, it seems to me you are a bit late in invoking guidance of the Almighty," I commented mildly. "But possibly God has done the guiding already by blocking the way."

Saunders made no reply, but did not look exactly resigned.

I felt sorry for him.

"You know, Saunders," I said, "I do not think she would have made you happy."

"No, I am sure she would *not*, sir," he agreed with surprising emphasis.

"You appear to speak with conviction on that point, man. What reason have you for that view?" I asked curiously.

"She is a false woman, sir, double-tongued and treacherous."

I raised my eyebrows.

"Marry! you do not mince your words. What has she done to deserve such scathing criticism?"

"She lied to me, sir. I saw her passing a letter to that new man, Picard, and another time they met after dark by the moat, and I happed upon them on my return from seeing to your horse late one evening. Both incidents she denied when I taxed her with carrying on with Picard. She is an untruthful woman—and yet, God forgive me, I love her."

"She is an untruthful woman—and yet I love her," came an echo, as it were, from my own heart. My man and I, little as he guessed it, were brothers in calamity.

"What explanation can you give for her conduct, Saunders?" I asked with interest.

My honest servant shook his head miserably. "None, sir, unless she has put herself into the power of that son of Belial."

"Do you mean Picard, the footman?"

"Yes, sir."

"Why, he appears to me to be a harmless, well-behaved person," I said.

"Harmless, sir! When he bears the mark of Cain upon him! A murderer he is. A murderer in disguise."

"Heavens, man!" I ejaculated. "Whom has he murdered? Tell me what you know, and I will have him laid up by the heels at once."

The jealous lover caught the twinkle in my eye and looked crestfallen.

"That I cannot say, sir, but it is as plain as can be that he has the mark of Cain upon his forehead," he replied sulkily.

"Well, I never heard that Cain had his eyebrows scorched off, but of course it may have been so," I commented. "Only, it might be as well for you to remember, Saunders, that the mark put upon Cain was for his protection, lest any over-virtuous person took

it upon himself to avenge his crime. Now, look you here, man: brooding is unhealthy for any one. If it is a fine day to-morrow, and you have no fever upon you, I would have you take a letter to my cousin. The walk will do you good, and you will find my cousin, Mistress Matilda Sefton, at my mother's cottage. No one can make girdle-cakes like my cousin. Do not hurry back, but take your time and enjoy the girdle-cakes and fresh honey with which she will regale you. There is nothing like fresh honey for enlightening the eyes of a man. You remember Jonathan of old."

I had a double purpose in sending the honest fellow on this errand. My cousin Matilda was now installed at my mother's cottage, and was the greatest blessing to my dear old mother, and, knowing how full of womanly sympathy she was, I informed her in my letter exactly how things were with honest Saunders, for at the back of my mind was the possibility that, pity being akin, they say, to love, more might develop hereafter; for Saunders, with his great loving heart and simple, upright nature, would be just the mate for Matilda, and he was enough of a viking in appearance to attract any woman. In the meantime, this conversation had given me food for further thought. Evidently, then, the little bright-eyed minx of a lady's maid was also in the plot. Well, she looked as if she would revel in any intrigue.

Before many more hours had passed, however, I had other concerns, and more intimate, to occupy my

thoughts, for Captain Lovet arrived in due course on his arranged visit.

Our greeting of one another was constrained on his side and somewhat cool on mine. Secretly, nevertheless, I experienced a return of that attraction I had felt toward him the first time I met him. There was something uncommonly winning about his personality—a straight, manly look and total unconsciousness of his personal comeliness, although he was without doubt an extremely handsome man. Dark, like his father, he had my lady's regular features on a large scale, coupled with a finely proportioned figure full of natural grace and vigor.

By tacit understanding we both treated his visit as an ordinary exchange of courtesy between relatives, each carefully hiding his mind from the other until we could feel our way.

With my lady, however, it was different. She made no pretense about hiding her feelings—and the spontaneous gladness and unaffected warmth of her greeting of her cousin made me pause in doubt as to my wisdom in having given the invitation; not for her sake, for her welcome was too natural and familiar to rouse misgiving, but on his account, knowing as I believed I did his feelings toward her.

However, it was too late now to alter the situation, and I could only withdraw, as it were, a little to watch developments, and that unconsciously became my posi-

tion hereafter. I found myself, all against my will, an onlooker, closely observing, deeply concerned, but still only an onlooker at a drama acted by these two unfortunate persons, placed by fate as much as by any fault of their own in a totally false position.

The first evening passed off pleasantly and harmlessly enough outwardly.

My lady seemed to throw off all her depression and hysterical tendencies, and I saw her in quite a different light from any in which I had yet known her.

Gay, inconsequential, merry as a child, she laughed aloud at the slightest provocation; her dimple was constantly in play, her eyes sparkled and her cheeks glowed, and altogether she appeared the incarnation of light-hearted youth.

In responding to her sallies, and in laying himself out with the obvious desire to encourage them, her cousin too appeared in an unfamiliar guise, and seemed to have dropped at least ten years of his age.

At my suggestion we had music in the evening, and I ordered all the candles in the mighty candelabrum to be lit, making something of a gala scene in the large hall. Masterman even seemed to be infected by the atmosphere of festivity, and I saw a pleased smile upon his usually grave lips as he supervised the lighting of the candles.

My lady sang some pretty ballads and played with feeling upon the lute, and then, at her earnest desire,

her cousin himself sat down at the virginal and, after playing a few bars, sang to his own accompaniment.

He possessed one of those rare voices which have the power to stir the emotions of men as well as women; a voice deep with feeling and at the same time full of virile force, not mere mawkish sentiment.

I had never had the opportunity for learning to play any instrument, and my own voice was not only untrained but untuneful. It was a serviceable enough voice for giving orders to my men, but for the drawing-room I was often conscious it lacked that grace and culture which comes of breeding and education.

I was not a gentleman, and I was never more aware of that fact than that evening, as I stood leaning up against the carved fireplace, listening to the rich barytone voice and watching my lady as she sat a few paces from me, her hair shining like burnished gold beneath the candles, and her beautiful face turned in rapt attention toward the singer.

In the intervals of the music my lady and her cousin discussed the merits of the songs, interchanging their ideas with the enthusiasm and assurance born of knowledge and judgment, while I remained a silent listener. I had no opinion to offer; my preference for this or that piece was merely the uneducated fancy of the savage. I was outside the magic circle, an outsider altogether, in fact. With a certain grim humor I reflected that though I stood there the legal owner of

that beautiful hall, I was really an interloper, having neither part nor parcel in it. The hall, with its carved oak, great tapestry hangings, armorial bearings, and stained-glass, stood for those generations of noble knights and ladies whose portraits hung in the gallery above. There was no Peter Williams among them.

My lady may have read some hint of these reflections in my expression when she happened to turn to find my gaze fixed somewhat somberly upon her.

The vivacity died out of her face and a strangely troubled look took its place, as though my presence had recalled a disturbing memory which had momentarily lapsed. I felt grimly sorry for both her and myself.

Soon after that she indicated her desire to retire for the night, and, as was my invariable custom, I prepared to light her to her room. While she was bidding her cousin good night, Picard entered the hall to remove a tray of wine and fruit with which we had regaled ourselves. Neither of my companions paid him the slightest attention, which was natural, but, as my lady and I ascended the staircase and were about to round the bend at the little landing, I purposely glanced back into the hall, and perceived my guest and my footman both gazing thoughtfully and curiously after our retreating forms, and the tray in my footman's hands was held at a precarious angle.

My lady did not look back nor did she raise her eyes to mine when she gave me her hand in her customary

manner to kiss, but I noticed that her hand burned like fire as it lay in my palm.

"Good night, my Lady Rosamond," I said gravely, little dreaming that this was to be the last time I should repeat those words.

Upon returning to the hall, I offered my guest a pipe, which he refused. I, however, filled one for myself, for I have found the weed a help to consecutive thought, and I had a ticklish problem to solve.

We sat for some little time in silence, which I broke by inquiring:

"How is Lady Lovet, your mother? I hope she has recovered from her late indisposition, sir?"

"Thank you, sir, for inquiring," he replied. "My mother is not at all well, I regret to say. She has had cause for worry and anxiety lately."

I glanced at him through the tobacco smoke.

"In connection with a certain family matter, may I suggest?" said I.

He returned my look steadily.

"Yes, sir. My mother is much troubled on my cousin, Lady Rosamond's account, and regrets, as we all do, that she was called upon to act in the matter at all."

I nodded.

"It does appear to have been regrettable," I acquiesced coolly, "especially as it entailed a certain amount of deception. Any lying that was necessary

should, in my opinion, have been done by you ; but that view may be only my limited and uneducated outlook."

My guest turned a brick-red.

"I should deem that an insult demanding redress, sir," he exclaimed in a suppressed tone, "were it not . . ."

"Were it not that it was irrefutable," I interpolated calmly.

He strangled his rising temper with an obvious effort of will.

"You are right. I will admit it," he said after a moment's pause. "If you will allow me, sir, I will try and be as frank as I can, though the situation, being a peculiarly delicate one, is correspondingly difficult to handle. We all deeply regret, sir, that your wife was called upon to take any action in this matter. It was not fair upon her, or just to you, but the fact is that we, as a family, have been greatly handicapped by the present political situation. My father, as you are aware, and I are both loyal republicans. I hold a commission in the army, and have always, I believe, tried to hold it worthily. My father took sides with the Parliament in the great quarrel, against all his worldly interests, as far as could be seen at the time, and in opposition to all his family's wishes and sympathies. In spite of this, we are under the suspicion of the present Government and the victims of an irri-

tating espionage. Our correspondence is examined, our private concerns inquired into, and we have reason to suspect even that a spy has been placed among our household to pry into our privacy. It is intolerable, and enough to loosen the attachment of the most sincere supporter of his Highness the protector. My father has complained in person, only to have the matter pooh-poohed and denied. In the circumstances, you can understand, it is extremely difficult for us to ask any favor of the Government, such as a license to travel abroad."

"So you judged it would be easier for your cousin to obtain the necessary facilities by duping her infatuated husband," I commented.

He clenched his fingers with nervous force upon the arms of his chair.

"For heaven's sake, do not provoke me too far, sir," he exclaimed hoarsely.

"Well, a duel might simplify matters, after all," I retorted. "If I got killed, you could, no doubt, marry my widow. I cannot for the life of me understand why you did not demand her hand before, as the reward for your services. It would have been far more suitable, from every point of view."

Captain Lovet leaned forward abruptly in his chair, and scanned my face closely, fiercely, as though he would pierce through my outward man to the soul of me within.

"You do not regret your marriage?" he demanded, almost beneath his breath.

"Wholly and entirely," I replied, without hesitation leaning back in my chair.

He raised his clenched fist as though he meant to strike me full in the face, and I watched him interestedly, without moving. His arm dropped to his side.

"Good Lord!" he muttered softly, and then again, "good Lord!"

There followed a long pause; then:

"How long have you felt like this?" he demanded at length in an altered tone.

"Like what?" I asked with interest.

"How long is it since you have desired your freedom from this—this union?"

"I do not recollect ever saying I desired my freedom," I replied mildly.

"Well, you implied your marriage was a mistake." He corrected himself with impatience.

"Yes, I think it was—a regrettable mistake."

"Since when, I ask, have you thought so?"

"I do not know that I can supply you with the exact hour or day, Captain Lovet," I replied evenly, "and I do not see that it is quite your concern, either. I suggest that we change the subject before either of us says anything foolish. I suppose you do not happen to require a footman?"

My companion's expression of thunderstruck bewilderment was comical.

"A footman?" he repeated. "No, I do not think I do. Why do you ask?"

"Only because I happen to have one to spare," I replied, puffing at my pipe and obtaining much comfort therefrom. "You may have noticed him—the man who assisted Masterman. I believe he is an excellent servant, and Masterman speaks most highly of him."

"Why do you want to part with him, in that case?" inquired my guest, eying me doubtfully.

"Well, to be truthful, I have an unreasonable preference for servants with eyebrows and lashes complete. This poor fellow, as you no doubt observed, has accidentally lost his, and I cannot get accustomed to their absence. It came about through some chemical explosion, I understand, though, between you and me, I have reason to fear he has suffered from intemperance, for I taxed him with it, and he did not deny it. How often is this the cause of a man's social downfall! I should not be at all surprised to hear that Picard was your equal socially, Captain Lovet, and that, had it not been for strong drink, he might even be standing in his present master's place. Such are the curious vicissitudes of life!"

My sententious reflections were received in perfect silence by my companion, and glancing at him care-

lessly I was surprised to observe that he appeared to be laboring under some powerful emotion. His dark face had a sickly pallor, and he had rolled his handkerchief into a ball, which he pressed nervously into the palms of his hands, as though they felt clammy.

I appeared not to observe his agitation, and he presently remarked, quietly enough:

"Poor fellow! What you say interests me, but I fear I cannot engage him—at present, at any rate."

Soon after that we parted for the night.

The next morning, before starting off on my military duties, I had an interesting conversation with Masterman.

"Picard seems to be nearly recovered from his recent wound, Masterman," I began carelessly.

"Yes, sir; he seems to be quite himself."

"Quite himself?" I repeated thoughtfully. "No, I should not say he was quite that yet"; adding in my mind, "I wish to goodness I knew *who* he was." "Well, Masterman," I continued aloud, "as I mentioned to you before, I have a wish to reward the man for the service he did me. He undoubtedly saved my life that night, at the risk of his own. Did you ascertain from him what shape the reward should take? I suppose a sum of money would be the most acceptable form?"

Masterman met my glance with perfect composure.

"I did ask him, sir, and, as a matter of fact, the

suggestion he made, after a good deal of hesitation, was rather a strange one. He showed a good deal of diffidence in making it, as I think indeed he should, seeing that it smacks of ingratitude, to my mind, having so comfortable a situation. He is partly French, you know, sir, and it seems he has a great desire to return to his native land and settle there permanently."

"Ah, yes. I recollect he spoke something in like strain to me," I commented thoughtfully. "You mean, he desires me to give him permission to leave my service and obtain a license for him to travel?"

"Yes, sir, precisely," said Masterman, looking me straight in the eyes without a shadow of disquietude in his.

"He has a wife living in France, I understand," I went on.

Masterman for a moment seemed taken aback.

"Not in France, I think, sir. His wife is in England and wishes to voyage with him."

"Oh, is that so?" said I. "Then the license is to include a woman?"

"I suppose so, sir, as she wishes to rejoin him."

"Sad how drink will ruin the happiest of homes, Masterman," I philosophized ponderously.

"Drink, sir?" queried my steward, raising his eyebrows.

"Yes, strong liquor. Has Picard never taken you into his confidence, then?"

"No, sir; at least, not in that particular, sir. Did he admit he was addicted to drink, sir?"

"I taxed him with it, and he had the grace, at any rate, not to deny it," I replied solemnly.

"Very sad, sir, if that is the case," assented my steward. "He has shown no signs of the weakness while here."

"Your good influence has no doubt kept him straight, Masterman," I replied commendingly.

"Thank you, sir. What shall I say to Picard, sir, with regard to the matter we were speaking of previously?"

"You may tell him that as I am a strong supporter of happy marital relations, being so blissfully situated myself, I will endeavor to obtain for him and his wife the necessary forms to enable them to cross over to France and set up a united home there. I will see about the matter on my return to-night, and send off the letter by the next post."

"Thank you, sir. I am sure he ought to be grateful."

"Oh, I do not expect much gratitude; but you must get another footman, Masterman, to take his place, and this time see to it that he has the requisite amount of hair on his face, and I should prefer it of a more ordinary shade. I do not think I like auburn hair. By

the way, Masterman, one other thing. It might be as well to give Picard a word of warning that, as a married man, it is not seemly to 'carry on' with other young women."

Masterman looked genuinely astonished now.

" 'To carry on,' sir? What do you mean, sir? "

"I mean what is generally meant by 'carrying on,' " I replied.

"I am afraid I do not quite understand, sir."

"What, in your experience, is usually meant by carrying on with a young woman, Masterman?" I inquired guilelessly.

"I have had no experience of that sort of thing, sir," retorted my steward, with some stiffness, but I thought I detected a twinkle at the back of his eyes.

"Well, then, I mean the sort of thing you have had no experience of. Holding a young woman's hand in dark corners, and exchanging *billets-doux*."

"I understand, sir, but has Picard been doing this, sir?"

"I have been informed he has."

"Who was the young woman, sir, if I may inquire?"

"My lady's maid, Privet Joy," said I sternly. "And see you here, Masterman, she is too innocent and simple a creature to be played with in this way, so I would have you warn Picard, and threaten him that if he is caught philandering again I will cancel my promised favor."

"Yes, sir. Most certainly. I am surprised to hear what you say, sir. I will speak to Picard on the matter."

I turned away to mount my horse, with a faint smile of amusement on my lips. I knew Masterman had wit enough to appreciate the humor of the situation, even though he might be at a loss to discover exactly how much of the farce was known to me and to what length I was prepared to go with it.

Little desire had I to smile again ere the day was over, however. Farce did I call it, then? Rather was it a drama steeped in tragic consequences to myself.

CHAPTER XII

A QUESTION OF SINCERITY

IT is strange and awe-inspiring how the veriest trifle may affect a man's whole life and completely alter the course for weal or woe. Such an incident occurred on the very morning of my conversation with Masterman.

I rode out of the gates of Rookherst with a smile upon my lips—not a joyous smile, certainly, but one of amused appreciation of what then appeared to me to be a farcical situation. Within a mile or two of the gates my horse cast a shoe. There was no forge immediately at hand, and so I dismounted to let Saunders lead my animal to the nearest smithy at a village half a mile away, and to pass the time I strolled down a sandy lane out upon a common.

The track proceeded steeply up the side of a heather-clad knoll, from the summit of which I obtained a wide view upon all sides. It was a warm, sunny morning at the end of August, and I stretched myself full-length upon the tufty heather, gazing idly down upon the winding road below me. It was an unfrequented neighborhood at all times, and, being

also early as yet, there was no sign of life visible at first.

I had not lain there for more than a few minutes, however, before two riders came into sight round a bend. They were approaching leisurely, and my pulses quickened as I scanned the lines of their figures. There was no mistaking the graceful carriage of my lady, and her cousin, with his fine figure and easy seat, formed a fit escort and completion to the picture.

There was nothing to invite censure in their being out riding together. My lady had a liking for horse exercise before the sun was up in his full heat, and I had frequently been her companion on such rides as this. It was quite natural that her relative should be her escort in my absence. I had no right to carp at that, nor did I, but I had nevertheless some excuse for my eyes narrowing jealously as I watched them from my unseen point of vantage, for they rode at a walking pace, side by side, their heads bent near one another as those in confidential and earnest talk; and even as they came immediately beneath the steep bank upon which I lay they suddenly pulled rein, and I saw my lady bow her face upon her hands as though she wept.

When a beautiful woman weeps and a man who loves her is alone with her, who can blame him if he acts unwisely? Captain Lovet only did what nine out

of ten men would have done in his position. He stooped forward quickly and flung his arm around her shoulders. He did not kiss her then; I gave him full credit for that even in the midst of my furious jealousy.

He did not kiss her until she deliberately turned her face to him and raised her lips to his.

They rode on side by side, and I—God forgive me my sin—I cursed them and swore to be revenged.

So this was my peerless lady, the dream I had worshiped for all these solitary years, the woman I had loved for the last two burning months, the wife whose lofty standards of duty and honor I had revered and whose love I had hoped and yearned for.

Half an hour later I was continuing on my way, and I have no doubt the evil spirit which possessed me gave evidence of himself in my face, for even the faithful Saunders looked at me askance and fell back to a discreet distance in my rear.

At camp all those that could fled before my ugly temper, and the unfortunates who were obliged by duty to remain in my presence quailed miserably beneath the cruel lash of my tongue, and the diabolical desire which possessed me to inflict torture in some form or another upon some other human being, with the object of seeing some one else as wretched as I was myself.

With an unreasonable contrariness, however, one

of the first things I did that morning was to draft a letter to Mr. Secretary Thurloe, desiring him as a personal favor to send me a license permitting my footman and his wife to leave England with the object of residing in France.

This request I forwarded with other official despatches to London by a special messenger, little thinking that by this one act of seeming generosity I was sealing my own fate.

I returned unusually late to Rookherst. I had purposely sent Saunders on in advance to inform Masterman that I would not be back in time for supper and to carry my formal apologies to Lady Rosamond and her cousin. I felt nothing would induce me to eat at the same table with them that day.

When I entered the hall I found it deserted, but there was a letter awaiting me, heavily secured with government seals.

Upon opening it I found it contained a command from headquarters to report myself at Whitehall without delay in order to answer certain charges made against my military administration, to the effect that there had been shown culpable laxity in permitting strangers and uncertified persons to pass through and reside in the district under my command, without the precaution of detaining them for inquiry, thereby endangering the safety of the state, which required, in the present perilous times, that all suspicious or

unknown characters should be apprehended and examined as to their identity and business.

It amounted to a sharp reprimand, and I was grimly perusing the document for the second time when my lady entered the hall.

She approached me timidly, and I saw her glance from the letter in my hand to my face with a quick, anxious scrutiny.

"Have you had bad news, sir?" she inquired gently.

"That depends upon the point of view, madam," I replied coolly. "I fancy yours and mine differ, so you had best judge for yourself."

I handed her the letter, and she read it through with slightly knitted brows and absorbed attention.

Then, raising her head quickly, she exclaimed with apparently the impulsiveness of a child:

"Oh, these things do fill me with indignation. Not a week passes but some poor wretch is apprehended and cast into a filthy prison or shipped off to the tobacco islands, there to slave in the hot sun beneath the brutal lash of the man who has bought him. I would like to cry shame upon the lord protector for these wicked doings. People complained of the arbitrary rule of the late king, but this rule is far more arbitrary. We are beneath a tyranny undreamed of before. The lord protector dare not use a jury for

judging these men who oppose him, for he knows no jury would convict them, and if any counsel be got brave enough to defend a case he is put away into a dungeon until such time as the cold and solitude have damped his ardor for truth and chilled the courage of his convictions. Indeed, sir, I think you are right noble to have done as I see you have by this letter."

"Thank you, madam," I replied unpleasantly. "It is gratifying to know that you realize so fully what a noble husband you have, and therefore how fortunately situated you are."

She gave me a reproachful look and the light of enthusiasm died out of her face, leaving it strangely pale.

"You are pleased to gibe, sir," she said, with a certain appeal in her tone, "whereas I spoke in all sincerity."

"Since when have you spoken or acted in all sincerity, madam, in regard to myself?" I demanded ominously, the demon within me gradually mastering my better self.

She drew back a little from me as though in instinctive alarm. Yet her eyes met mine courageously.

"Perhaps you will explain yourself, sir?"

"Certainly I will endeavor to do so, my Lady. Tell me, which was the most sincere, the kiss you gave me up in that room yonder, or the one you gave your cousin out upon the common this morning?"

She looked as though I had struck her, and there was now no doubt about the fear—abject, startled, overwhelming fear—in her eyes.

There came a sound of footsteps approaching along the gallery upstairs. With a convulsive movement she actually clasped her hands upon my arm.

“For God’s sake do not say any more just now; do not speak of this before him, if it is he coming.”

“You need not agitate yourself unduly, madam,” I said cruelly. “I should be no match for Captain Lovet in a duel. You need only recall the fact that your late footman and I fought our battles with bare fists, as village louts would naturally do, to realize that I should have no chance against a trained and experienced fencer such as a gentleman by birth invariably is. I am not a gentleman by birth, instinct, or training, which must be my excuse for not understanding your standards and for treating you according to mine, as I intend. I have had enough of this fooling.”

She gave a little gasp.

“I swear you are mistaken,” she said faintly.

“Mistaken! Then I must suffer from hallucination. Do you deny you kissed Captain Lovet upon the common this morning, madam?”

“No, I do not deny it—but—”

“But, no doubt, it was only a sisterly kiss,” I sneered.

She made an odd little sound; whether it was a laugh or a sob only her recording angel could decide.

"Yes, I meant it only as such," she faltered.

"Then I would ask you a further question. Please try and answer it truthfully, if you are capable of so doing. Are you aware that Captain Lovet loves you?"

She met my glance with sudden anger in hers.

"Yes, I do know, sir. He has loved me for as many years and more than you have, and with a more stable affection, it would seem."

"That may be," said I deliberately. "There are men who continue to love after being fooled, and your cousin is apparently one of them. But that, to my uncultured mind, appears to give the less excuse to your conduct, madam."

She flushed hotly beneath my unswerving gaze.

"*He* understands," she muttered rather helplessly. "You do not."

"No, I confess I do not. The situation seems to me liable to misunderstanding. You are aware of the fact that your cousin loves you, and you deliberately kiss him and encourage him to kiss you. And you say he understands!"

"He does understand," she persisted. "If you knew what he knows, you would realize that the meaning you put into my action could not possibly belong to it."

"The only fact, madam, which could convince a

man of this, in my opinion, is the knowledge that the woman he loves herself loves some one else. In your case, I fear, your cousin can have no such conviction."

"He has."

I averted my eyes for a second.

"I mean love for a *living* man, madam," I said slowly. "Your cousin has no living rival, I think."

Something odd in her expression made me stoop and stare into her eyes suddenly. She tried to avoid my gaze, but, as a fluttering bird trying to escape from a cage runs straight into the hand stretched open to capture it, so her unwilling glance was captured by mine as though drawn thereto by a magnet.

"Do you love some one, then, madam? A *living* love for a *living* man?" I asked quietly.

"Yes, I do—I do," she exclaimed desperately. "Will you let me go now?"

I was not holding her, but the sense of being captured by my will must have assumed a material force to her at that moment.

"Yes, you may go," I said straightening myself up slowly. "Small wonder you baffle the average man. You appear to have as many loves as you have moods. You will afford me an interesting study, I think, in the future—when I have you entirely to myself, and you have no other male being within range to practise your charms upon."

She stared at me as though mesmerized.

"What do you mean?" she asked in a small voice.

"I mean that it is my brutal intention to take you out of your present elegant setting, my Lady, and to plant you in a new land, in totally different surroundings, where you will have to work with your hands as the wife of a laborer should, and where, perhaps, removed from this atmosphere of intrigue and sham, acting and scheming, you may develop into something nearer the likeness to the noble woman God must have intended you to be. Incidentally, also, you will have no man to love but your humble servant, at your service," and I made her a low mocking bow.

"And Rookherst and all—all this—" she made a comprehensive gesture with one hand—"is this nothing to you?"

"Has it ever been anything to me, madam?" I asked.

"No, perhaps not while you had your faith in me, and your mad infatuation for my person inspired you," she persisted with a curious earnestness. "But, now that the disillusionment of which I warned you has come, and your idol has been shattered past redemption, your love having changed to hatred, and the desire to punish being your strongest feeling, I ask you, why not banish me alone, and find consolation in the substantial blessings included in the bargain?"

"Where should I banish you to?" I asked curiously.

"Oh, I don't know," she replied carelessly and defiantly. "Send me to the new land you speak of, or shut me up in a hut in a wood. The main thing would appear to me to put me so completely out of your life that you could happily forget my existence and enjoy the luxury and comfort of your estates in peace."

"I will consider the matter," I said thoughtfully.

She gave me a considering glance, and her brazen composure stupefied me. She seemed suddenly to have made herself mistress of the situation.

"I think, on the whole, it simplifies matters that you should have come to hate me," she said calmly. "One has fewer qualms about hurting a person who dislikes one and whose main desire is to hurt one in return. It becomes more or less a game of wits, then, as to which can do the hurting first and most effectively."

Her cool, defiant eyes were upon me, and I felt an overwhelming provocation to seize her in my hands and to shake the breath out of her until she gasped for mercy.

Acting under the stress of this intense irritation, I stretched out my big hands and gripped her by the shoulders.

God knows what I should have been provoked into doing, for I had already felt her wince under the brutal roughness of my grasp, when I heard a stumbling

step behind me, and turning my head I perceived Picard in the act of depositing a tray upon the end of the long table.

The man stood directly in front of one of the candles, and in the full light I saw his face was white with passion, and if a glance could have killed me I should have been a dead man then.

Releasing my hold upon my wife, I turned deliberately to face the man.

"Ah, Picard," I said, with a wicked gibe in my voice, "you will be interested to learn that I have applied for a license for you and your wife to travel abroad. I hope all your recent extraordinary misadventures will be a lesson to you, Picard, not to despise conjugal bliss and to avoid again breaking up your home through self-indulgence and excess."

The man looked me full in the face. "Damn you!" he said, and, swinging round on his heel, made as though he would leave the hall.

"No, you don't, my man," said I coolly, striding across the intervening space and interrupting his passage. "Now, then, what do you mean by that?" I demanded. All the demons that had been making havoc of my soul during the last twelve hours seemed to have crowded together in a triumphal onslaught. I was beside myself with an unreasoning, frantic desire to hurt and harm some one. My lady I could not hurt as I would, for I loved her, but this man,

for whom I cared nothing, I would torment before I saved.

He must have read something of this madness in my face, for I saw him pause and check the furious retort which trembled on his lips. This prudent effort cost him something, for the veins stood out like cords through the swarthy skin of his forehead.

In the brief silence my lady spoke, and in her voice there sounded an agony of appeal.

"Oh, sir, let the affair end, I pray you. You are not yourself, neither am I—nor yet Picard, it would seem."

"I beg your pardon, my Lady, I am myself, and have never pretended to be other than what I appear. But, as for you and this footman, that is another matter, and you are the best judges of that. Here, you, Master Footman, on your knees and apologize for using that word to me, sirrah, or I will have you horsewhipped."

It was at that moment that a double interruption occurred in the persons of the worthy Masterman coming through the door and of Captain Lovet descending the stairs almost simultaneously. They both stopped short in amazed concern at the sight of the scene before them.

Master and man in a towering passion and a frightened woman in an imploring attitude between them.

"Good heavens, sir, what is the matter? What has

occurred?" ejaculated the stately Masterman, hastening forward. "What are you doing here, Picard? Go about your duties immediately," he continued peremptorily, but I read the acute anxiety underlying his austerity, and it tickled me, angry though I was.

"Nay, Masterman," said I, "Picard has a penance to perform ere he departs, if he would avoid the pain and indignity of horsewhipping."

The good steward's face was a curious study. His ruddy, healthy complexion became a sickly white; his firm lips parted in tremulous uncertainty.

"What—is—it—you—have ordered him to do, sir?" he asked in a low, hesitating voice, and I saw his eyes seek my lady's face as though for inspiration.

"He used a word to me which I cannot let pass. He must apologize upon his knees," replied I.

There was a deathly silence in the great hall.

Then Picard made a slight movement.

"Very well," he said gravely, "I—" But before he could finish his sentence Masterman sprang forward.

"No!" he stormed. "It shall not be! It is too much! May heaven preserve us from such indignity. I will apologize for you, and, if that is not sufficient, let me bear the horsewhipping, sir," he exclaimed, turning to me with tears actually in his eyes. "See, I kneel to you, sir, and offer you my humble apologies for the word inadvertently uttered."

"Good heavens!" I ejaculated with certainly un-

feigned astonishment at the turn of events. "You, Masterman, on your knees to save your subordinate the indignity!" I looked round the circle of faces ironically.

"Would you not care to immolate yourself also, my Lady, or you, Captain Lovet, for the sake of this precious footman? There is plenty of kneeling space available. That will do, Masterman. I accept your apology, and as for you, Picard, my advice is, keep your temper until you are safely out of England; then you can let it loose upon your wife, if you like. I won't add this time, refrain from strong drink, because we have all of us acted as if we were more or less intoxicated—even Masterman."

I thereupon walked away from the group, and ascended the stairs with never a glance behind me.

Captain Lovet no doubt lit my lady to her room that night, for I did not.

CHAPTER XIII

A LIFE FOR A LIFE

UPON reporting my arrival in London the following day I received instructions to wait upon the secretary of state in his office, which I accordingly did.

Mr. Thurloe's quiet, grave face looked slightly disturbed when he saw me.

"Ah, General Williams," he exclaimed, "you have lost no time in coming. I am glad of that, as a disagreeable duty is best got over promptly."

I saluted in silence, and after a moment's pause he continued:

"I am sorry to say his Highness is seriously displeased with you, General. You had your instructions to use all vigilance to detain suspected persons wherever discovered, and we find you have failed to exercise your powers in the district under your control. This is a serious dereliction of duty, sir, and for your own sake, and because of my feeling of personal friendship toward you, I hope sincerely that you will be able to explain your conduct satisfactorily."

"Is there any other criticism made on my administration, sir?" I inquired.

"None," replied Thurloe. "The district within your command has been remarkably orderly and well conducted; but that will not excuse you for a non-observance of orders."

"No, sir, I quite understand that; but no doubt his Highness has some specific examples of this neglect on my part, as it would be unfair to condemn a man on general principles which he might find it difficult to refute."

Thurloe gave me an oddly penetrating glance before replying deliberately:

"I think you will find his Highness has a specific instance to question you upon. He will be ready to receive you by now, I fancy. Will you accompany me, please, General?"

My interview with the lord protector was not a pleasant one to recall. The moment was a most unpropitious one, for information had recently reached the Government of the fate of the enterprise in the West Indies and the subsequent breaking up of the great armament of sixty ships and nine thousand soldiers intended to win us the riches of the Spanish islands, the news having been carried home by Admiral Penn and General Venables themselves, the leaders of the expedition.

The protector was reputed to be a man of violent temper, though he rarely permitted himself to be

mastered by the same; but when the gallant commanders presented themselves before him with their woe-ful and contradictory accounts it was whispered abroad that his Highness made no attempt to control his wrath, and was indeed beside himself with fearful passion, to the entire confusion of the two officers, who found themselves that same day lodged in the Tower, there to recover their wits at leisure. With sinking heart I now foresaw myself walking into the aftermath of this storm, and one glance at his Highness's face upon entering the room close upon Mr. Secretary's heels was enough to convince me of the correctness of my foreboding.

Cromwell's naturally red complexion had assumed a purplish tinge, and the warts and pimples which disfigured it were more pronounced than ever; his corrugated brows were drawn together in an ominous frown, beneath which his eyes gleamed coldly at me.

"You need not wait, Mr. Thurloe," he began stiffly; "I will send for you if need be."

When the door closed upon the secretary's neat, orderly figure, the protector leaned back in his chair and fixed a cold stare upon me for what appeared to me to be an interminable length of time.

It required all the powers of self-control that I could muster to bear this steady scrutiny with anything approaching composure.

"Well, General!" at length he broke out in his harsh

voice. "You appear to carry an uneasy conscience with little discomfort."

I raised my eyebrows in polite surprise.

"I am not aware of having an uneasy conscience, your Highness, but I confess to having been putting my life history through a searching examination during the last three minutes."

Cromwell's expression relaxed ever so slightly, and I felt I had scored a point, and was proportionately relieved; but the relief was short-lived.

"You recollect my visit to Rookherst, and a certain conversation we had that evening in your study. If I remember rightly, I warned you then not to forget that you were a soldier of the state before you were the husband of a charming woman?"

"I recollect perfectly, your Highness."

"Apparently it has not borne fruit, then."

"How so, your Highness?"

"If you had acted upon my words you would not have made your roof a shelter for an enemy of the state you profess to serve, sir."

"I should be glad, sir, if you would explain more fully of what I am accused, for I confess candidly I am in the dark at present," I said.

Cromwell gave me a steely glance, then picked up a document from his table.

"This is an order for the arrest of a footman in your employment who is a disguised enemy of the state,

and has been in arms against the commonwealth.”

“My footman, sir?” I repeated thoughtfully. “If you remember, he entered my service under a cloud, and it appears he is to leave it under one, too. That man is certainly wedded to misfortune. Who is he, your Highness?”

“That is what I expect you to tell me,” retorted the protector.

“I am afraid I cannot for I do not know who he is, if he is not one Picard, a footman. What name is he to be arrested under, may I ask your Highness?” I inquired curiously.

Cromwell continued to stare hard at me while I spoke; then, with one of his sudden, unexpected alterations of mood, his face relaxed and he actually smiled.

“Verily, I was hoping you could supply a name,” he said, “for upon my word I do not know who the fellow is myself. I am inclined to believe you are honest, Williams. I confess I had my confidence in you shaken, but much against my will, and I am only too glad to give you the benefit of the doubt. I will therefore inform you of the facts as now known to me. You, no doubt, remember the occurrences recounted to you previously when an agent of ours in Cornwall led us on a wild-goose chase after the supposed Charles Stuart? Well, it seems this agent, with the forlorn hope of reëstablishing himself in our confidence, continued to haunt the neighborhood of South

Molton, and at length was rewarded for his perseverance by being successful in bribing the son of the cottagers in whose house he asserted he saw the prince. This lad was a heavy, half-witted creature, but shrewd enough to be able to supply some valuable links in a curious chain.

“From him my man learned that the boy’s father happened to pass through South Molton while taking his farm produce into market, the day following the Penruddock affray. The bodies of the slain insurgents had been thrown into a ditch by the roadside, and from among them came the sound of one moaning. The farmer gets him out of the cart and after a little search finds an officer among the bodies who is not dead, but quite unconscious. With the help of the half-witted son, the man, who appears to have had brains enough for both, strips the Royalist officer of his uniform and exchanges his clothes with one of the common soldiers. In this disguise he brings the rebel home to his cottage, and keeps him there, which was generous, considering he had no pay for food and lodging. It seems the man retained a note-book he had found in the stranger’s pocket, but, being unable to read, it was no help to finding the man’s identity, the stranger remaining stubbornly unconscious for some time; and when he did recover he had apparently lost his memory and could give no coherent information. This went on until a cousin of the farmer arrived in the neighbor-

hood, a man employed by a firm of wine-merchants, traveling backward and forward between Cornwall and the Midlands—the man, in fact, who was detained at Salisbury later on and had on his person the letter addressed to your steward. This man, being literate, was able to decipher the pocket-book and by its means evidently discovered their guest's identity and traced his relatives, for, according to the boy's narrative, a strange gentleman arrived one day with a purseful of money and was closeted for several hours with the Royalist, and after that the farmer's family appear to have been liberally rewarded for their pains. The lad's delineation of the visitor is as vague as most of his narrative. He could only describe him as a dignified, serious-looking gentleman who alarmed him greatly when he looked at him. His dates are equally uncertain, but this visit would seem to have occurred somewhere at the end of June or the beginning of July. From this time the health of the refugee improved rapidly. His memory returned and he was able to write several letters, which were delivered to the traveling cousin with substantial payment each time.

“Then came the scare about Charles, and the visitor was bundled out of the house secretly the same night and taken off in a cart covered with straw to some unknown destination. The half-witted lad's account ends here, but by means of the intercepted letter at

Salisbury we can carry the narrative on to its undoubted final stage, where the Royalist refugee next appears at Rookherst as a footman."

The protector paused and watched me narrowly.

I drew in my breath.

"A most curious tale, sir," I said, "but there can be little doubt the footman and the Royalist officer are one and the same. The question is, who is he, and what claim can he have upon Rookherst?"

"As to that," replied Cromwell, "one rebel will help another at all costs, and your fair lady has always been, as I warned you, an active assister in all enterprises of rebellious nature. The main thing is to apprehend the man; once here, there will be little difficulty in identifying him, I fancy. Here is the order of arrest, Williams; I give it over to you to prove to you that I still have confidence in you that you will do your duty. Bring the man up with you, and all doubts of your loyalty will be cleared away." He spoke in his former genial tone, and his expression was friendly.

I took the paper with genuine relief, thanking him with all sincerity for his mark of renewed confidence, and I was in the act of placing the document in my doublet when the door opened and Thurloe entered, carrying an open letter in his hand.

His expression was disturbed, and it seemed to me he purposely avoided looking at me as he walked up to the table at which the protector sat.

"This letter, sir, has just reached me," he said

gravely. "It should have been handed in last night, but was mislaid by one of my clerks."

Cromwell took the sheet of paper and read it with a frown which grew more ominous every second.

With a suffocating sense of dismay I had already recognized my own handwriting upon the paper, and divined that it was my unlucky effort at generosity returning like a barbed arrow to my own bosom.

At length Cromwell raised his eyes.

"What am I to deduce from this, Williams?" he demanded harshly. "Here is a letter from you requesting a passport for the man under discussion!"

I saw no use in attempting to hide my perturbation and discomfort, even if I could have done so successfully.

"I am afraid it will be a difficult matter to explain, sir," I replied unhappily, "but I will make an effort to do so, if you will permit me."

"Speak on," he said, curtly.

Briefly I described the incident upon the road and Picard's share in it. "The man undoubtedly saved my life, sir, and when I signified my desire to reward his service, and he asked for a license to leave the country in order to settle down with his wife in the land of his birth, I could scarcely refuse so small a request."

Cromwell listened attentively to my tale, never for an instant removing his eyes from my face.

"Very good, General; you have certainly given a

plausible explanation; it only remains to put it to the test. You have the order of arrest in your possession. Take it and act upon it, and bring your man back with you—whoever he is. And remember, it is to be a life for a life. If you bring him here, all will be well; if you do not produce him . . .” He paused significantly, and I filled in the gap almost mechanically.

“I understand, your Highness. I will bring you the man, or, should I fail to do so, I will report to you in person.”

He nodded.

“I see you take my meaning, General.”

The interview was at an end. I saluted the two great men and withdrew, pausing in the gallery immediately outside the door to mop my brow, which was clammy with perspiration.

I was in the act of doing so when I heard my name spoken, and turning perceived my accoster to be General Sir John Preston, a man who had great influence with Cromwell, and one whom I knew more by repute than from personal acquaintance, but for whom I instinctively felt a high respect and admiration.

He now met my glance with friendly curiosity.

“Have you been with the protector, General Williams?” he asked. “Is he within the room?”

I nodded and replied:

“Yes. I have just had a pleasant chat with his Highness.”

He smiled appreciatively.

"Was it as bad as all that?"

"Well, it might have been worse, I suppose," I replied reflectively. "I might be lodged already in the Tower, instead of being a comparatively free man for the next forty-eight hours."

"And after that?" he inquired, looking at me with close attention.

"After that, unless I can deliver a certain individual to his doom, I shall be a doomed man myself."

"I should make every effort to produce the other, then," he suggested with seriousness.

"That I am going to do," I replied grimly enough, "but I have a curious premonition that fates have willed it otherwise."

He shook his head decidedly.

"You must master fate, man. But look you here, General Williams; if you are in any difficulty that requires the assistance of a friend, will you look upon me as that friend? I will do all in my power to help you, as a brother officer."

We gripped hands, and I felt warmed and supported by this unexpected sympathy and genuine brotherliness from a man who stood high in the estimation of all honest men and was by breeding as well as by nature a true nobleman.

I made my way direct to my lodging in Fleet Street, where Saunders, the ever faithful, awaited me.

It was then about two o'clock in the afternoon, and I calculated if we set out at once we should reach

Rookherst by about six o'clock, the roads being good. It meant a hard day's ride to do the journey twice over in the same day, but our horses had had several hours' rest. It was imperative I should get back as quickly as possible, lest my victim should have time to take fright and flee.

In my mind I had no uncertainty as to my course of action. There was no place for sentimental scruples in those unhappy days. It was ever and again a case of a life for a life, and the weakling and the scrupulous went into the gutter.

It was nevertheless with deep misgivings that I rode through the sunny lanes that summer afternoon.

Who was the man? What claim had he upon my lady, and upon her relatives? How would his arrest and most certain fate affect my lady and her attitude toward myself? Our relations were already strained. Would this seeming betrayal on my part bring matters to a breaking-point? And, if so, what then? What line of conduct should I adopt with her? Once having entirely alienated her sympathy and turned her present indifference into active hatred, what hope would there be for ever realizing the dream of all these years?

Should I, then, bow to the inevitable, give up hope of ever winning her for myself, and leave her alone, or should I by fierce unscrupulous force coerce her into at least outward submission to my will, contrary to my

oath to her, and trust to the power of my determination to wear down her opposition in time?

They were disturbing thoughts, and it was with some relief that I caught sight at length of the gates of Rookherst. Active action of any kind was preferable to this miserable weighing of pros and cons.

CHAPTER XIV

A RIDE AGAINST TIME

MASTERMAN met me at the entrance, and he looked both confused and perturbed at the sight of me; but this fact did not cause me surprise, for, as I had left Rookherst at dawn that morning, I had scarcely more than caught a glimpse of the worthy steward before my departure, and this was, therefore, virtually the first time we had met since the memorable scene of the previous evening, and I could understand that to a man of Masterman's temperament the indignity to which he had voluntarily subjected himself would leave its mark behind in self-consciousness and discomfiture.

I passed him with a curt nod, and strode on into the hall, where he followed me, dutifully, to await any orders.

"Any letters or news, Masterman?" I inquired casually.

"No, sir."

"Where is her ladyship?"

"I am not sure, sir, at this moment precisely where she is."

"And Captain Lovet?"

"The captain left this morning, sir."

This was news, but I had expected it.

"He instructed me to tell you, sir, that he would write to you personally."

"Very good. By the way, Masterman, I have a document here to give to Picard. Send him to me."

The steward looked up quickly, and there was eagerness in his glance.

"Is it the passport, sir, which you promised to procure for him, may I ask?"

"Which I promised to try to obtain for him," I corrected coldly. "These matters take time and trouble, don't forget. Go and tell him to come here. I have a mind to give this to him myself."

"Yes, sir," replied the steward, retiring immediately.

When a quarter of an hour had passed and no footman made his appearance, I rang a bell sharply, and Masterman reëntered the hall. I noticed his face was unusually pallid.

"I told you to send Picard to me. Where is he?"

"Has he not come, sir? I will inquire."

As I watched his retreating back an idea flashed through my mind. Acting upon it, I got to my feet, and mounted the staircase with some rapidity to my sanctum.

Proceeding straight to the cabinet in which I kept my papers, I tried the lock.

My suspicion was corroborated; the lock had been

forced, and a hasty examination showed that the original passport I had obtained for my lady to visit her brother had been abstracted.

The plot was clear as daylight. Without a moment's hesitation, I walked across the passage and lifted the latch of my lady's bedroom. The room was empty, but here and there were signs of hurried departure: a pair of gauntlets dropped upon the floor, a hood tossed over a chair, and her gown, the one she had probably worn that morning, and hastily exchanged for one more suitable for traveling, lying upon the bed, just where her maid had thrown it, too pressed for time to pause even to fold it.

It was with a somewhat unpleasant expression on my face, I fancy, that I descended to the hall again. Here I found Masterman awaiting me. One glance must have convinced him that the farce was ended.

I observed him draw in his breath quickly, and as it were brace himself for the inevitable encounter.

"Well, Masterman," I said grimly, "I see the mystery bird has flown, and my lady too." I glanced at him sharply. "Did Captain Lovet accompany them?"

"Yes, sir."

"When did they leave?"

"Early this morning, sir."

"How soon after I left?"

"Within an hour, sir."

I made a rapid calculation. They would have reached Dover then in the afternoon. The mail packet-

boat was due to leave the harbor at dawn. I glanced at my watch.

It was just six o'clock. I could hardly hope to reach Dover in time, but by means of post-horses I might do so.

I would make the attempt anyway. Masterman read my thoughts, and I saw him pass his tongue nervously over his dry lips before he spoke hoarsely.

"The boat leaves at dawn. You cannot hope to get there in time to stop them. Thank God."

My anger broke bounds.

"Thank God, you say? If they escape, they may well thank God, for I swear if I catch that precious footman he shall swing for all the trouble he has caused, and the elegant captain too shall wish he had never crossed my path. I have been generous enough in the past, and now I will follow another course; and, by heaven, either they or I will be broken within forty-eight hours.—Saunders!" My voice rang through the arched hall, harsh and unpleasing, an outcome of the jangling discord within me.

Masterman took a step forward.

"Sir," he said, and his voice shook with emotion. "I implore you, as you value your own happiness, not to meddle further in this matter."

"My own happiness!" I sneered. "Where does that come in, my good Masterman? And since when have you concerned yourself with that?"

"You will not believe me now, sir," he repeated, and

there was pathos in the hopelessness of his manner, "yet I swear to you, if you will only let things take their course now, it will be for your truest peace of mind hereafter."

"My *peace of mind*, now, I note, not my *happiness*, my honest Masterman," I jeered.

He returned my look gravely and sadly.

"The peace of mind that comes from a clear conscience, sir, the happiness which springs from noble conduct."

I snapped my fingers contemptuously.

"Fine-sounding phrases, Masterman, will not satisfy a man thirsting for the common kinds of happiness which spring from love and such-like ordinary weaknesses of human nature. Preserve your clear conscience and noble conduct for yourself, by all means, and glean what comfort you can from their possession, but remember there are two sides to most things, and I happen to have had the seamy side of your *noble* conduct turned to me, and therefore have been unable to appreciate it as, no doubt, I should.—Saunders! Ah, there you are. Get fresh horses saddled immediately. We must reach Dover before dawn."

Saunders showed no surprise.

"Very good, sir. I will see to the horses at once."

I turned back to resume my position by the fireplace, to find myself covered by a pistol.

This unexpected move on the part of the steward took me completely by surprise. I was unarmed at

the moment, having laid my pistols upon the table at my entrance, and the household was out of ear-shot, the kitchen quarters being so far separated from the hall that until Saunders's return Masterman had me at his mercy, with little fear of interruption.

"So you intend murder, my friend?" I inquired pleasantly.

"No, sir, but I intend to prevent you riding to-night."

"And you propose to accomplish that amiable intention by means of the thing in your hand, may I ask?"

"Yes," he replied grimly; "unless you give me your word of honor that you will relinquish your plan, I intend to cripple you."

I eyed him dubiously.

"I hope you are a good shot, Masterman," I said. "At present your pistol appears to be in a straight line for my heart, which is a delicate organ and might cripple me permanently."

He made no reply, but the weapon shifted slightly, and then wavered alarmingly.

"I wish you would keep it still, man," I exclaimed irritably. "I should prefer it was steady, even if aimed at my heart."

"Your man Saunders will be back soon, sir; you must decide quickly," said the steward, desperation sounding in his voice.

"I must have a stronger reason than the one you have chosen, Masterman. If you answer me a ques-

tion or two, it may help me to decide. First, who is Picard?"

"That I cannot tell you. My lips are sealed."

"Very well. Then answer me this: Will Lady Rosamond come back to Rookherst?"

I saw him hesitate, then he replied solemnly and slowly: "I hope she may come back one day."

"But not as my wife?"

He met my eyes with a curious far-away look in his.

"Not as your wife. She has never been your wife, except in name."

I flushed hotly with annoyance at the man's insolence and the knowledge he apparently had of my most intimate concerns.

"It seems my lady has discussed our matrimonial relations pretty freely with you," said I. "So, being only a wife in name, she has decided she can pass out of my life altogether without any great injury being done, I suppose, to either of us. What lover has she selected?"

Masterman regarded me with cold hostility.

"Lady Rosamond has had only one love in her life, to my knowledge, sir."

"Then your knowledge of her is not as intimate as mine, Mr. Steward," I retorted.

"We waste time, sir. I must request you to decide. I will count five, and then I shoot. One . . . two . . ."

At that instant, from my position with my back to the fireplace, I observed Saunders pass the window, silhouetted against the evening sky. Saunders, for all his big simplicity of heart, was no fool. I saw him pause and take stock of the scene within, and then disappear.

"Three . . . four . . . Will you give your promise, sir?"

"No."

Two shots rang out simultaneously.

I was correct in my apprehensions as to Masterman's markmanship, or else he was flurried by the suspicion of Saunders's arrival on the scene. His shot went wide and struck the carved mantelpiece above my shoulder; whereas Saunders's bullet reached its mark and the steward fell forward on his face.

"Not killed, I hope, Saunders?" I asked hastily, stooping over the prostrate man.

"No, sir; only his thigh, sir. It should be three inches above the left knee, sir—a safe spot, sir."

Together we raised the steward into a sitting position upon an arm-chair.

His face was deathly white, but not, I believe, from pain or fear.

"Go and fetch some of the household, Saunders, to attend to this hurt, for we must be off. Ah, here comes some one," as a scared servant ran in.

"Now, haste you, Saunders," I continued, "and pack into a bag to take with us a razor and a candle and a

piece of cork. We will do some undisguising to-night, if we are in time." I glanced down at the wounded man as I spoke, and was disturbed by the agony in his eyes.

"I am sorry you are hurt, Masterman," I said remorsefully.

"That is nothing, sir. It is not that which troubles me. But ah! sir, why will you go to-night?"

"My good fellow," I answered with a touch of impatience, "it seems it is a choice of two evils. If I go, according to you, it is to meet some mysterious disaster; if I do not go, I forfeit my life."

"Forfeit your life? How so?" he cried, amazed.

I withdrew the order for Picard's arrest from my doublet, and held it open for him to read.

"I never expected this, sir," he muttered. "Then it is known already; there can be no secrecy now?"

"No," I replied seriously. "Whatever is done now must be done openly; either this man or I will swing at Newgate."

"We never dreamed of this, sir; we none of us thought of any danger to you."

"You imagined it could be all done in a corner, I suppose, without any of the authorities being any the wiser?" I suggested with some bitterness.

"Yes, we hoped so; we none of us dreamed your life might be in jeopardy."

"That would be the last thing you would desire, I suppose, Masterman!" I inquired sarcastically. "Yet

I confess to being rather nervous about myself just now."

"I told you, sir, that I never intended to kill you," he replied earnestly.

"No, I quite understand it would have been purely accidental if you had, my good Masterman; still I was a little nervous. Ah! here come the bandages. Your needs will now be attended to. Have you collected the things we shall require, Saunders?"

"Yes, sir, and some soap and soda, too. It is invaluable for removing stain and dye from hair, sir."

I laughed, and threw a glance of defiance at poor Masterman.

"And now to ride like the devil, Saunders. Good night, Masterman. With any luck it will not be I who swings at Newgate. And when I come back to Rookherst you must have daily practice at shooting at a target, Masterman."

Once upon horseback, riding through the moon-lit roads, I laughed no more. Mile after mile we rode in silence, and deeper and deeper plunged I into abysmal thought.

A hideous suspicion had sprung to life within me—a suspicion that had flitted across my mind before, only to be banished as too preposterous to be even contemplated.

This now not only returned, but remained, took form, and grew, and clamored to be examined and tested by the hard facts as known to me now.

If this was the case—if it could possibly be the truth, when had it become known to my lady?

I believed I could put my finger upon the very day and hour when she became cognizant of it.

“I have received agitating news”—her words and very tones seemed still to sound in my ears. “I am not quite myself.” She had shrunk away, visibly trembling from my touch then, and from that day her attitude toward me had entirely changed.

First she had kept aloof and held me at a distance, and later on, when once the stranger had arrived and was apparently safely installed, her manner had relaxed with every evidence of relief, and she—I shuddered as I dwelt upon the next phase—she had set herself deliberately to coquette with me, in order to gain her object, namely, the passport she needed for herself and him.

Good heavens! how I had been duped! And yet when I came to think of the weird, horrible, naked fact in its entirety, what could any wife, put into such a position, do other than she had done?

When she discovered that the husband she had mourned was still alive, while she was in outward form married to another man, and moreover to a political opponent, could she be expected to confess her knowledge to that other man, and thus jeopardize the safety of the husband she loved? Would she not rather sacrifice everything, including truth and honor, to shield him,

and convey him into safety? That the other man, the nominal husband, should be sacrificed also would necessarily be a minor consideration.

The whole chain of facts and probabilities gradually worked themselves out, link by link, in my tired, restless brain.

One question hammered itself upon my mind with ceaseless reiteration:

"What was I going to do if I reached Dover before dawn?"

Supposing I apprehended Picard, and proved that he was in reality Lord Killigew, what then?

What could I hope to attain by delivering him up to his death?

True, his widow could then become my legal wife, but would not the dead husband stand between her and me even more potently than the living man did now?

I should save my own neck certainly, but would not life itself be death, and its joys and desires turn to dust and ashes in my grasp?

I should be revenged—ah! that thought had a tingle in it! Revenge is sweet to an embittered soul, and my soul was very bitter within me then.

That would be something worth attaining. I dug my spurs into my horse's flanks. "Ride like the devil, Saunders," I cried over my shoulder, "for we have the devil's own work to do to-night."

Moved by some unreasoning impulse, I turned my

head again a minute later, and took a view of my manservant. In the moonlight I saw his lips were moving soundlessly.

"What are you doing, Saunders?" I asked sharply. "Praying?"

"Yes, sir; I was praying for you."

"For me? Wherefore?"

"I do not know, sir," he replied quite simply. "I always pray for you, sir."

"Thanks: it is very good of you, I am sure," I said, the evil spirit within me prompting me to mockery.

Saunders had many virtues, but a sense of humor was not among them. He now began laboriously to explain himself.

"It is not because I think you need my prayers, sir," he said ponderously, "for you are a good man, sir, and an example to me and others."

"That I certainly am not," I shouted suddenly and furiously. "You are a fool, Saunders. Hold your tongue, and keep your prayers for some less saintly character than you think me to be."

We rode on a space. A cloud crossed the moon, and a little wind rose up and moaned softly like unto a woman crying.

I turned my head.

"Saunders."

"Yes, sir?"

"Perhaps you had better go on praying."

"Yes, sir, thank you, sir."

“And, Saunders——”

“Yes, sir?”

“You are a fool, but a lovable fool.”

“Yes, sir, thank you, sir.”

CHAPTER XV

ACCEPTING DEFEAT

WE rode into Dover town as the dawn was breaking cold and gray.

I had no difficulty in deciding where to look for my quarry. There were only two inns of repute to choose between, and I hit upon the right one at my first venture.

The landlord was already known to me, and upon recognizing me his sulky annoyance at being awakened before his time gave place to an obsequious greeting. When I showed him the order of arrest and explained my reason for arriving at that early hour, he was all eagerness to assist me in my duty.

“Fortunately, the boat’s departure has been put off until six o’clock, your Honor,” he said; “also the man you require is in a room alone. Her ladyship insisted upon his having a room to himself, because he was unwell, and she feared it might be infectious, as her maid also had fallen sick on the road and had to be left behind.”

“We need not disturb the whole hostelry, in that case, which is all the better,” I said. “I think the best

plan would be for you to accompany us to his room, and knock on the door as though it was time for him to be roused. I surmise his door will be bolted, you see, and as we cannot get in to him we must get him to come out to us. You can then leave the rest to me."

The landlord grinned his comprehension.

"One thing more," I added. "I do not wish this affair to become common gossip. You understand me?"

"Yes, your Honor, perfectly. I will not breathe a word of it. Am I to inform her ladyship, your wife, of your presence, sir?"

"No, certainly not. You can show me later on the apartment she is occupying, but on no account is she to be disturbed."

"No, sir. Very good, sir. It will be shock enough to her ladyship to learn that the man-servant is a rogue, after all her kindness and consideration, too."

The ruse proved entirely successful. The landlord thumped heavily upon the door, which rattled beneath his lusty blows, and a voice within, which I recognized as my footman's, called out hastily.

"What is it?"

"What is it, indeed!" grumbled our crafty coadjutor. "Time to get up, you lazy, good for nothing lady's maid; that's what it is. But for me you would never catch the boat."

There came a sound of hurried movement from behind the rickety door, and the poor dupe ejaculated;

"My watch must have stopped; and yet it is going now. Very good. I will be out without delay."

To judge by the literalness with which he fulfilled this statement, he must have lain down in most of his clothes. The stout landlord had hardly stumped his way noisily down the stairs before the bolt was pulled back and the door opened quickly to reveal Picard fully dressed.

He stepped straight into the barrels of our two pistols. I could have found it in my heart to pity him at that moment, had I been myself. His complexion looked ghastly in the dim light, but he was a brave man and made no moan when he saw fate was too strong for him.

"I see I am caught," he said quietly. "What do you wish to do with me?"

"Shave you and wash you," I replied laconically.

He gave me a steady look.

"You do not know who I am, then?"

"I am about to inform myself," I retorted coolly.

He made no reply, but, obeying a gesture from me, reëntered the room he had been about to leave, and seating himself on a stool beside the small table, submitted to having his feet and wrists securely bound by Saunders with a piece of stout cord.

After which precaution my handy man lighted the candle we had brought with us and busied himself with shaving-brush and razor.

I turned my back upon the operation and stood gaz-

ing absently through the tiny window. Somehow I could not bring myself to watch the transformation being carried out before my very eyes.

Presently I remarked:

“Put the eyebrows in thickly, Saunders.”

“Yes, sir; but bushy effect is difficult with cork, sir,” replied the good fellow, and I wondered whether, after all, he was as simple-minded as I had imagined.

“It is done now, sir.” Saunders’s voice sounded odd.

Slowly and reluctantly I turned round and directed my gaze upon the silent seated figure. The metamorphosis was complete. Although I had fully expected to see what I now saw, the reality and all it meant pierced through my soul with an agony indescribable.

A deathly stillness pervaded the room for a few seconds; we must have seemed to be three statues.

Presently one of the statues laughed.

“Very well done, Saunders. Keep guard over the stranger. I will now go and see my wife.”

Killigew started forward on his stool and attempted to rise to his feet.

“For God’s sake, Williams, have a care what you do.”

I laughed again, and he must have seen the devil in my eyes, for he cried out passionately:

“May God protect her and blast you if you lay a finger upon her. She is no wife of yours, and you know it. Wait—listen—I will——”

But I passed out of the room, unheeding.

I met the worthy landlord awaiting me below, and at my request he led me to my lady's apartments. These consisted of a small anteroom, with a bedroom beyond.

I closed and bolted the outer door of the anteroom. Then I crossed to the inner door and lifted the latch.

My lady lay sleeping, as I had once pictured her, with her golden hair streaming around her over the pillow and her lips softly parted. The dying moonlight made a pale illumination in the room, and in the ghostly radiance her face looked almost lifeless in its beauty and stillness.

Presently she stirred in her sleep and drew in her breath with a little sobbing catch, as though she was being made afraid, and I moved back, noiselessly, steadily, coerced by some unseen force. Who shall say that it was not the prayer of a faithful servant, combined with the prayers of a godly mother, which drove me back into the other room then and pressed me down on to my knees by the window.

How long I knelt there I do not know.

I felt the sea-mist swirling in, damping my hair and wetting my face, and saw the first streaks of sunrise cut their way through the gray sky; but I knelt on.

I hardly think I prayed at all; certainly not deliberately. My soul was a desperate battle-field, and I but an onlooker, exhausted by merely watching the struggle.

I was roused by a knock on the outer door, and, upon rising stiffly to my feet and opening it, I perceived a sleepy-looking servant-girl, bearing a can of hot water and a tray of wine and bread.

"It is but an hour to the time the boat should sail, your Honor," she said. "Shall I rouse her ladyship?"

"Yes, go in, but do not inform her ladyship that I am here," I ordered.

The girl entered the bedroom, and I heard a murmur of voices within. Then she came out again and withdrew.

The minutes passed.

I could hear faint rustlings within the room.

Presently the door opened, and my lady came out. For a second she did not seem to realize who I was; I suppose the dim light, for it was a misty morning, was misleading, and her thoughts far from my person.

When she did recognize me she took a step back, her face deathly white, and leaned for support against the wall.

"You! Oh, *why* are you here?"

"Because *you* are, madam."

"Where is he? What have you done with him?" she cried, forgetting all caution in the extremity of her agitation.

"To whom do you refer, my Lady?" I asked politely.

She recollected herself, and I saw doubt and uncertainty in her face.

"I mean, where is my man?"

"*Her* man, indeed!" I thought bitterly within myself; aloud I replied:

"Picard? I believe he is with Saunders. I will send for him presently. In the meantime, madam, what are you proposing to do? I thought I made it clear to you that that passport could no longer be considered valid?"

She clenched her hands convulsively.

"I *must* use it; it is imperative I should cross by the packet-boat to-day."

"'Must' is a strong word," said I gravely. "I can stand between you and the packet-boat, madam. Have you considered that?"

She looked at me wildly—but controlled herself sufficiently to say in a trembling voice:

"You cannot be so cruel as to prevent me, now I have come thus far. I implore you, sir, be not ungenerous. More than you think depends upon this journey."

"So I imagine," I retorted grimly enough. I paused a minute, then leaned forward so as to obtain a better view of her face in the gray light. "My Lady, when you wished first for this passport, I asked, you remember, whether I could be sure you would return to me if I gave it to you. How does that promise stand now?"

I saw the doubt leap afresh to her eyes, and I saw something besides doubt and fear; I read aversion there—deep, uncontrollable aversion.

She made no reply, and I waited for none. Sick at heart, and filled with unutterable confusion of soul, I turned away and walked to the door. Opening it, I glanced down the passage.

As I had guessed, the landlord stood expectantly at the end of the corridor, and at my beckoning hurried up to me.

"Tell my man to bring the other here at once," I said in a tone too low for my lady to hear.

With a nod the landlord retreated.

I turned back and closed the door again. My lady still kept her position by the wall. I looked at her wonderingly. It seemed incredible that she could be prepared to serve me thus, with no sign of compunction, no pitiful softening of her expression, no word of regret.

She met my eyes and flushed.

"Why this delay?" she demanded; and there was the old hauteur in her tone. "If you intend to frustrate me, say so and have done with it. What are you waiting for?"

"For your man, my Lady," I replied soberly. "I have just sent for him."

"And when he comes, what then? What will you do then?"

I regarded her curiously, but made no reply.

Presently there approached the sound of footsteps along the passage, followed by a knock on the door.

In response to my summons, Saunders entered with his prisoner and, closing the door carefully behind him, saluted Lady Killigew and myself deferentially, his face as wooden as the carving of a viking. I now observed that, besides having his wrists bound, my man held his lordship by means of a leathern thong round his neck, a somewhat unkindly suggestive method, to my mind.

My lady made no sound; every line in her figure seemed to become rigid and all vestige of color fled from her cheeks; her eyes were fixed upon her husband.

Killigew, however, scarcely glanced at her. With a fierce gesture of his fettered hands, he demanded of me:

"Have you harmed her?"

"Answer that question, my Lady," said I quietly, compelling her with a glance.

Through her pale lips she replied:

"He has done me no injury."

I looked at my watch.

"You have exactly thirty minutes in which to reach the wharf, Lord and Lady Killigew," I said. "It is ample time, but I suggest you do not delay. Unloose his lordship, Saunders."

With obvious reluctance my man began to slacken the thong, and in doing so, I noticed, he inadvertently, no doubt, tightened it up for a second, sufficiently to

make Killigew jerk his head back, with a gasp. When he was free, his lordship took a step toward his wife, and then paused to look at me doubtfully:

“Do you really mean this, Williams?”

“Apparently I do, my Lord. There is your wife; take her. I give her back to you a pure woman in the eyes of the world, even as though she had never been through a form of marriage with me. But,”—and the fury which possessed me shook me in its giant grip, and crashed through my voice,—“though pure in the eyes of men, I say she is polluted in the sight of heaven.”

Killigew turned a dusky red.

“I will force you to retract those words one day, sir,” he exclaimed passionately. “I am helpless now; for my wife’s sake I cannot even say what I would. My lips are sealed for the present, and I must bow to fate and accept yet another favor at your hands. But if you will come overseas when you can do so I will gladly meet you at any place and on any date convenient to you, and give you the satisfaction required by gentlemen.”

I nodded.

“I will do so, my Lord, unless circumstances render our meeting impossible.”

He frowned sharply, and I could read in his face the fierce desire of the man to relieve himself of the intolerable burden of the obligation he owed me.

"Between gentlemen circumstances are not permitted to interfere in matters of honor, sir," he retorted hotly.

"My good sir," said I dispassionately enough now, "I am not a gentleman, and have never pretended to be one, which possibly is the reason I am trammelled with common kinds of scruples and am likely to find myself mastered by circumstances over which I have no control. But time passes; I think you had better delay no longer."

I allowed my eyes to rest upon my Lady Rosamond for the last time.

She moved forward slowly and hesitatingly, and then, with an obvious effort, raised her eyes to mine.

"You have dealt nobly with us, sir," she said in a low voice. "I hope it may be some repayment that Rookherst will still be yours. I have lodged the necessary legal documents with my uncle at Tunhill."

I received this remark with deep silence, amazement filling my mind to the exclusion of all else for the moment.

Killigew understood the situation if she did not.

With a little flush he interposed hastily:

"I fear Rookherst will not repay General Williams for all he has done for us, Rosamond. I can only look forward to the hour when he and I shall meet as gentlemen, and the payment be made in life-blood.

For the present I must needs accept this last favor at his hands—the bitterest pill of the many I have been forced by him to swallow. Come; we must be gone.”

They passed out of the room together, and I followed more slowly with Saunders.

“What do you wish me to do now, sir?” queried the latter.

“Go and get fresh horses; we will ride to London.”

“Very good, sir,” replied my tired man, turning dutifully away.

I called him back.

“I have changed my mind. We will get us to bed, Saunders, and then have breakfast before proceeding on our way. We will take it quite leisurely, Saunders, as befits gentlemen at ease. There appears to me to be no need for hurry, after all. It has become a bad habit.”

My man saluted again.

“No, sir, it can do no good to hurry,” he said, and there was a desperate melancholy in his voice, and I observed his face was working for all the world like a baby’s about to cry.

For my own sake as much as his I forbore any comment, and we went our separate ways.

I paused on *my* way to have a word with the landlord.

“See here,” quoth I, “I find the man was not the

same as the individual named in the order of arrest. There was a mistake in the identity. Keep the matter quiet," and I slipped a coin into the man's fat palm.

CHAPTER XVI

“HAVE YOU GOT THE MAN?”

IT was late in the afternoon when we reached Rookherst again, for I had decided to break our journey there to exchange our travel-worn attire for something more suitable for my forthcoming interview with the lord protector. Also I had a desire to speak with Masterman again, as I foresaw possible difficulties in the future in getting into communication with him.

In this object, however, I was frustrated, for upon inquiring of the nervous, curious-eyed servants at the house I was informed that the steward had left Rookherst for an unknown destination early that morning, despite his wounded leg.

The servants evidently knew nothing of certainty of the true facts but surmised much, and I was glad to leave the desolate house and get out of range of their inquisitive eyes, when Saunders and I again took up our journey to London.

We spent the night in my old lodgings in Fleet Street, and next morning I sought an interview with the protector. After some delay I was informed that

his Highness was engaged, but would see me at a certain hour that afternoon.

The temporary reprieve was not altogether welcome, for I had now an earnest desire to get the dreaded interview over as quickly as possible.

Punctually at the hour specified I presented myself again at Whitehall, but was kept for half an hour in an anteroom adjoining the room usually used by the protector. While I was waiting there, Sir John Preston passed through, and upon recognizing me paused to inquire kindly:

"Well, General, I hope you caught the man?"

"Yes, I caught him," I replied gloomily.

"Good. I am glad. You have brought him up with you, I suppose?"

I shook my head.

"No, for unfortunately I let him go again."

The general gave me a keen glance, then held out his hand suddenly.

"I fancy you have some honorable reason, sir. If I can be of any help to you, you can depend upon me."

We gripped hands, and I felt the warmth of a true man's sympathy and understanding, which was to support me in the ordeal in store for me.

Upon my entry Cromwell acknowledged my salute with a grave air.

"Well, General?" he inquired. "Have you got the man?"

“No, your Highness.”

He bent his terrible frown upon me.

“Wherefore not? I presume you went back to Rookherst with the order of arrest?”

“Yes, sir, I returned the same evening, but I found the fellow had gone.”

“Had you no clue as to where he had gone, that you could have followed?” inquired Cromwell, his eyes like gimlets upon me.

“Yes, sir. I had reason to believe he had gone to Dover, and I followed him there.”

“But arrived too late, I suppose. No doubt he had a forged passport?”

I hesitated a brief second. It seemed an easy lie to utter, but I was sick unto death of lies and intrigue and subterfuge.

With fierce impatience I turned from the temptation, such as it was.

“No, he was there—I caught him all right, but let him go again.”

Cromwell struck the table in front of him with his fist.

“By heaven, I swear you ’ll hang for this, Williams,” he shouted furiously. “You convict yourself of treason, and you dare to mingle it with insolence.”

“I intended no insolence, sir,” I said humbly enough, “and I apologize if I seemed to do so.”

“Who was the man?” he demanded, unmollified.

I was silent, miserably aware that things were going as badly as possible with me.

"Answer me."

Still I remained dumb. It seemed to me at the moment I would rather be torn in pieces than expose the whole humiliating story of my unfortunate marriage.

"So you would be sullen now? Very well! There are methods by which a man may be persuaded to speak, even against his will, Williams. Men have been branded and lost their ears for less than this."

With an effort I held down my rising anger, which I realized would only make matters worse. I was impotent when dealing with this man, and had best admit it at once.

"Your Highness has power to do what he wills, and I have no desire to be either sullen or insolent, but the matter into which you inquire touches my honor so closely that I must beg permission to keep it secret, while submitting myself to any fate you think fit."

"Your fate, General, you yourself settled. I hope you did not come here with any vain hopes of escaping it?" he said coldly.

I smiled as I shook my head.

"No, sir. I had no illusions of that sort."

"And you admit the justice of it?" he demanded sharply.

“I never questioned it, your Highness. I knew it was to be a life for a life.”

Cromwell struck a bell at his side, and then leaned back in his chair, regarding me rather curiously.

Some person or persons entered the room from behind a large screen a little to my rear. I imagined it was a guard to take me in charge, and so did not at once turn my head. I saw Cromwell shift his gaze from me to the new-comer behind me, and something odd in his expression prompted me to follow his glance. With a sickening sense of unreality I saw my lady standing there.

The protector looked from one to the other of us with a grim smile. Then, addressing me, he remarked:

“This lady came to see me last evening and told me a strange tale. If it is true, it enables certain omissions in your account to be filled in, General. But it is a story of so wild and improbable nature that I, for one, must have strong proof before I accept it. Is this lady your lawful wedded wife, Williams?” he broke off abruptly to inquire.

For a moment I could frame no reply. I was struggling to conquer the dizzy sickness which nearly overpowered me. It was as if a ruthless hand had torn open afresh a partially soothed wound. I had striven with some success to put my lady’s personality completely out of my mind and to find relief in the

thought that my span of life was now very short, and that in death all this useless, futile sorrow would be forever engulfed.

But the sight of my lady there before me in flesh and blood, breathing the air of the same room, was devastating to my hoped-for peace of mind.

A violent uncontrollable trembling seized me in every limb. In desperation I cried out:

"This woman is not my wife."

"But she says she is," retorted Cromwell. "Which of you am I to believe?"

With an effort I regained my self-control.

"Your Highness, as you evidently know so much, I will make no further secret of this affair. The man I permitted to escape was Lord Killigew and my—and—his wife was with him. I was under the belief that she had gone over with him. Why she did not accompany him, and why she has come here, I cannot comprehend. It appears to me to be folly incredible."

"Incredible, I agree. The whole thing appears to me to be past credence," commented the protector, "and yet this lady has sworn to me she is your wife."

A wild, insane idea flashed through my mind:

"Was not that Lord Killigew, then?"

Cromwell answered my question quietly:

"Yes, that was Lord Killigew, but apparently this is not Lady Killigew."

We both turned our eyes upon the woman before us, and she looked straight at me.

“Lady Killigew is my cousin,” she said. “I am Una Lovet—or, at least, I was—before I married you. We resemble one another so closely that few can detect us apart.”

She spoke in a low, but firm, clear voice, and in her eyes I read the courage of the woman.

My first remark must have seemed entirely inconsequential to his Highness.

“Then Captain Lovet is your brother?”

She actually smiled, a queer little fleeting smile, revealing the dimple for a second.

“Yes, sir. My brother and I have always been lovers.”

The feeling of unreality still gripped me, and, as I groped in my mind for further light, my thoughts journeyed back to my strange wedding-day.

“When did the exchange take place, then?” I asked stupidly. “I am afraid I do not yet understand. You seemed to recognize me at the wedding ceremony, and yet you could not have seen me before?”

She hesitated the fraction of a moment, and then replied quietly:

“I had seen you before—seven years before, but you did not know that—and you never saw my face. May I tell him the facts I have told your Highness?” she continued, turning deferentially toward the protector.

Cromwell gave a curt nod, and she began thereupon :

“My cousin, Lady Killigew, did not learn that her husband was alive until about three weeks before her proposed marriage. All the arrangements had been made, and the date actually fixed. To withdraw from her contract then and confess the truth would seemingly have meant signing the death-warrant of both her young brother then in prison and of her husband, whose capture would most certainly have followed. There appeared to be only one way out of the dilemma, which was for me to personate my cousin. I was all the more willing to do so because we had the strongest hopes at that time of arranging for the safe conveyance of Lord Killigew overseas as soon as his health permitted of it; and therefore believed the deception would only be required to be persisted in until such time as my cousin and her husband and Lord Lovet, her brother, were in safety, after which my father intended to confess the whole story to you, your Highness, and to pay what penalty you thought fit—as I explained to your Highness previously. The unforeseen confusing of the person of Lord Killigew with that of Charles Stuart, however, put an end to all our hopes of getting his lordship quickly out of England. All the ports were of course immediately closely watched, and all wayfarers obliged to account for themselves, and it was with the greatest difficulty that Lord Killigew was conveyed out of Devon, and every hour he was in danger. It was then that Masterman con-

ceived the idea of his lordship entering Rookherst as footman in the place of Forster. To me the plan sir, was most repugnant; I shrank from it—not, I beg you to believe, from cowardice or lack of loyal affection for my relative, but because it seemed to me to be an odious thing to practise a further deception upon you in this manner.

“My hands were forced, however, and when, after several communications had been exchanged between Lord Killigew and us, it became clear that unless we could give him shelter his capture was inevitable, I acquiesced, and the plan was duly carried out, with, as it seemed, entire success. I cannot tell you with what relief I saw the tangle seemingly unravel itself before us. Lord Killigew was not recognized, thanks to his drastic disguise; the alarm about Charles Stuart died down; and the way for smuggling the supposed footman out of the country seemed to be quite easy. But you know, sir, how far astray went our plans and how heavily punished I have been for my sin.”

She ceased speaking abruptly, and I averted my eyes from her face. I could not look upon her tears.

Cromwell also appeared ill at ease. He cleared his throat several times and scowled gloomily at the table, tapping it the while with his knuckles.

Presently he remarked:

“You had better finish the tale, I think, madam, since you have got so far.”

Bravely she took up the thread of her story again.

“When you left Rookherst, sir, the day before yesterday, to go to London in response to your summons, it seemed to us that no time should be lost, for we feared you had begun to suspect us. We opened your cabinet and obtained the passport. A messenger was then sent to Lady Killigew, who was taking my place at Tunhill, instructing her to meet us at a previously arranged rendezvous, where my cousin and I were to exchange our identities again. The plan was for Lord and Lady Killigew to continue the journey to Dover, while I intended returning at once to Rookherst, in order to be there by the time you came back, when I should have confessed the truth to you as soon as I had ascertained that my relatives were in safety. Owing to a series of mishaps, however, our meeting was so greatly delayed that I could not make the return journey the same day, and therefore decided to wait till morning, never dreaming that you would return from London yourself the same night, sir. Soon after dawn, however, Masterman arrived at the inn where I and my maid lodged. In spite of the accident which had befallen him, Masterman had taken horse immediately after you left for Dover, and ridden post-haste to inform us of how the situation stood.

“It became, of course, clear to me at once that my presence would be required in London, whichever way events turned,” she added simply.

“Why?” Keen anxiety lent sharpness to my tone. She gave me a grave, direct glance.

“If you had arrested Lord Killigew, sir, I should have been required to explain the situation, and if you had failed to secure him, or by any chance permitted him to go free, I should be required even more, if perchance I might avail to appeal for the life of a brave man who was willing to suffer for another, and that other no friend of his.”

The protector's harsh voice here broke in.

“Well, madam, you have made your story appear as plausible as it is possible to make it. I repeat, however, that I must have the strongest proofs before I can accept it. I therefore propose to send a safe-conduct pass to the supposed Lady Killigew to enable her to come here in person, so that I may judge for myself of this extraordinary likeness. If this tale is true, then, General Williams, it appears to me you have been finely duped all round. You have, it would seem, been tricked out of a wife, an heiress, and an estate, and it is a little difficult to know where you stand legally.

“If, however, it should turn out that this tale is merely a fabrication to give you a loophole of escape, then woe betide you, my friend, for I warn you your fate will not be a pleasant one. I would also make it quite clear to yourself and to this lady that although the presence of this lady's double, as the real Lady Killigew, will afford a certain extenuation for your conduct, there is only one thing which can save you from the severest punishment, and that is the surrender

of that person, whoever he is, whom you suffered to escape.

"For the present, and until such reasonable time as is required for communications to be exchanged between the parties concerned, you will be lodged in the Tower, General Williams."

He rang the bell again sharply, and this time an officer and two soldiers entered the room.

"There is your prisoner. Carry out your instructions," commanded Oliver briefly.

The men took up their position one on either side of me, preparatory to marching me forth, when my lady took a step forward.

"Your Highness, I crave a favor. May I be permitted to bid my husband farewell?"

Cromwell bent his penetrating gaze upon her face for a second, and I saw, with a thrill of pride, how unflinchingly my lady's blue eyes encountered it. Then, "You have my permission, madam," he answered gruffly.

Swiftly and unhesitatingly she came toward me where I stood stiffly at attention between my guards; the next instant she was courtesying low before me; then taking one of my hands in her own she raised it to her lips, and I felt her warm kiss upon it.

I felt something besides: my hand was wet with her tears.

CHAPTER XVII

SENTENCED

A MAN has leisure enough to pass through a whole gamut of feeling during eight weeks' solitary confinement in a dimly lit cell. I entered that cell a surprisingly happy man, considering the fact I was still under sentence of death as far as I knew.

For the first day or two my heart was too full of a song of thanksgiving on account of the reestablishment therein of my lady's image in all its purity and nobleness to occupy itself with my own immediate fate.

Soon, however, a reaction had set in. My ideal certainly was unimpaired, my lady had acted throughout with all the unselfish courage I could have expected of her, but this fact no longer served to content me. I was still alive, still a restless male creature, craving something more warm and satisfying than even the most perfect rectitude of conduct, the most selfish pity and gentlest commiseration. My lady had wet my hand with her tears of compassion; she had spoken with sincere appreciation of what she considered my right

conduct. That was gratifying, but it was not sufficing.

As the days and weeks passed by, my mind swung like a pendulum, miserably alternating between hope and despair—one day daring to believe that my lady did actually love me, as a woman loves a man, the next bitterly ridiculing myself for pretending to mistake natural womanly pity for anything else.

Gradually even this oscillation ceased; there is nothing so undermining to hope in whatever form as solitary confinement for any length of time.

By the end of two months without a visit or a message from the outside world, I had become prey to a melancholy past describing.

It was in this mood that Mr. Secretary Thurloe found me when he arrived one morning, precise and dapper, irreproachably dressed, with his habitually unruffled expression of countenance.

He greeted me kindly, as was ever his wont.

“I greatly regret that you have been kept in durance for so long a period, General,” he said. “It has been a most unfortunate necessity, owing to the fact that in spite of repeated inquiries we have been unsuccessful in all our efforts to get into communication with Lord and Lady Killigew. They have not yet reached Cologne, and young Lord Lovet professes to know nothing of their whereabouts. They appear to have vanished completely, and you can see for yourself how seriously this fact must militate against you. His Highness, however, with his usual love of justice, has

taken pains to collect all the evidence he can in your favor, and by means of a number of witnesses he has become convinced of the truth of the strange story of your marriage and the deception of which you were the victim. In view of the extenuating circumstances, therefore, his Highness is disposed to be merciful to your fault, grave though it be, and the death-sentence which would otherwise have been your due is to be commuted to one of imprisonment for life. The lord protector will see you personally, and my private barge is awaiting at the steps. If you give me your parole, sir, to make no attempt to escape, we can forego the publicity of a guard and row quietly together to Whitehall."

I thanked him gravely and gave the necessary promise, realizing how kindly meant was his proposal. On the journey I thought I would try and get some light upon a problem that had been agitating my mind, and inquired whether the exclusion of all visitors had been of deliberate intention on the part of the authorities.

"Yes, I fear it was," he replied. "His Highness thought it advisable that there should be no communication between you and the other parties concerned, as he desired to make sure there would be no collaboration in the witnesses' stories. We received a great number of requests for permission to visit you from your friends and relatives; particularly insistent, of course, was your wife." He paused a moment, then

added with a sidelong glance, "Mistress Williams appears to be a woman of unusual determination and courage, in addition to being endowed with so much personal charm."

About half an hour later I was again in the presence of the lord protector.

As I crossed the threshold in the immediate rear of the secretary of state, I became aware that the room we were entering was already well filled.

Behind the long table facing the doorway sat Cromwell, and on either side of him two or three officers of senior rank, lending the air of a court martial to the proceedings, while between the table and the door, lining two of the walls, stood a number of other persons, some known and some unknown to me.

Involuntarily I paused a second, as my gaze traveled quickly over the scene, for among the persons standing silently there were my lady, her parents and brother, Masterman and my man Saunders, and my lady's maid, the pretty Privet Joy.

Cromwell waited until I had taken up the position assigned to me immediately opposite him.

Then he began to speak gravely and slowly:

"Major-General Williams, I have now sent for you because it seems to me and to these gentlemen beside me, your fellow-officers, who have considered your case with me, that enough time has been allowed to pass in the futile effort to obtain further witnesses in your favor. We have done all we could to get in com-

munication with certain persons who might have materially assisted you in your present position, but it has been in vain.

"I therefore am forced into the belief that these persons do not intend to come forward, or even to communicate with us on your behalf. However, in spite of this default on their part, I have been persuaded by numerous witnesses, the majority of whom are here present, of the truth of your unusual story. This being so, it has been decided to soften the rigor of your sentence. I now offer you the choice of two alternatives, General: you may either decide at once or be given three days in which to do so, if you prefer to think over the matter.

"In either case, it is a life-sentence, in view of the gravity of your offense and the deliberate nature of the same. I give it to you to choose between detention for life in the Tower or some other prison in the realm, with such facilities as are usual for having your relatives near you, retaining your rank as it is—or to be publicly degraded to the ranks and suffer banishment to the West Indies, there to serve under Major-General Fortescue." He paused, and then added, "You may, if you desire it, take three days to consider the matter, as I said before."

"Thank you, your Highness," I replied without hesitation. "I can give my answer at once. I choose the second alternative, and am grateful to your Highness for the option you have given me."

The protector gave me a long, steady look.

"Remember all it means, Williams. You will find the public degradation hard to bear. Serving in a lowly position afterward will be galling, and, besides, the climate of Jamaica is such that in the army our losses from sickness alone are enormous and scarcely bear thinking thereon. I urge you to weigh the matter carefully and take your leisure to decide."

Our eyes met, for the only time in my experience, as man to man, not as chief and subordinate.

"In my place, sir, you would make the same decision," I said simply, hardly realizing whom I was addressing.

He smiled one of his sudden extraordinarily attractive smiles, which lit up his harsh, severe face as the sunlight plays over a rugged mountain-side.

"You divine rightly. To you, as to me, it seems, Williams, it is decreed we shall serve our country at all costs. But I fear me we worship a fickle mistress—one who will lavish caress and praise one day and the next spurn her lovers and repay their devotion with hatred and insult. Happiness enough, however, to have loved and served her and perchance added to the glory of her name.

"So be it, Williams; you shall go out to fight our battles in the great warfare which is begun in the West—a warfare, as I am convinced,—and I believe I am taught of the Holy Spirit,—which is according to God's mind, being even against that Roman Babylon of

which the Spaniard is the great under-propper. In that respect we fight the Lord's battles; in this the Scriptures are most plain. He has a controversy with our enemies, and, even though for our sins and shortcomings it has pleased Him of late to punish us and to put us to shame and reproach in the sad loss sustained at Hispaniola, yet I verily believe it is still His will to set up His banner where before our enemies bowed down to their idols. He hath smitten us indeed for our sins that the glory might be for His name alone, yet now will He bind us up and raise us up to serve Him better. You have, it is in my mind to add, chosen well, Williams. May the Lord therefore strengthen you with faith and cleanse you from all evil, that you may fight manfully on His side, and re-establish your loyalty, which has of late been unhappily tarnished through personal considerations. May the covenant-fear of the Lord be upon you, to keep you from harm."

With the last solemn words the protector raised his hand, as though invoking God's protection and blessing upon me.

Had I doubted the sincerity of this strange man I should have chafed beneath such a harangue, uttered at such a moment, in such circumstances, but so great was his personal ascendancy, so commanding his visionary ideals, and so overwhelming his belief in himself as being inspired by God that I, for one, and, I believe every other person in that room at that mo-

ment, stood with reverently bowed head while he called upon the name of the Almighty, and held up his hand in benediction.

A strange manner, indeed, it might seem for one man to pass a life-sentence of exile upon another, but, far from feeling the least desire to rebel against either the man or his decree, or even the manner of pronouncing that decree, I was conscious only of a strong desire to prove myself worthy of this man's belief in me, to win his commendation and reestablish myself in his favor and confidence, and possibly above all I desired to strive even as he strove for the honor of the country he loved so passionately, and from whose bowels I had sprung, whose soil clung to my hands—low-born son of a peasant that I was.

The silence immediately following upon the protector's speech was broken by a familiar voice from my left.

"And it please Your Highness to pardon a liberty, may I make a request?"

All eyes were turned upon honest Saunders, who had stepped forward, his handsome viking-like countenance aglow with a deep flush.

Cromwell, who held this type of manly soldier in high esteem as a breed created at the outset by his own effort and example, replied urbanely enough:

"Speak on, my man. I would hear your request."

"It is but this, sir, that I may be permitted to accompany my master abroad when he goes."

Cromwell's face softened, and he turned a kindly expression to me.

"You are not lacking in well-wishers, Williams. Captain Lovet has already desired to bear the penalty of your lapse from duty in your place; and now your man craves permission to share it with you."

I glanced across the room to where Captain Lovet stood beside his father, and I noticed for the first time the haggard look of his handsome face.

The fine dark eyes which met mine were full of misery and futile rebellion.

"God knows, sir," he broke out passionately, turning toward the table, "I was sincere when I said death would be preferable to me than the bitter regret I shall now always carry with me, knowing that a brave man has suffered thus for generous dealing with our family."

Cromwell nodded, as though comprehending the speaker's outlook.

"Had this view been taken by all the members of your family, Captain Lovet," he remarked gravely, "General Williams would not be standing there. Unfortunately, there is only one person who can bear his punishment for him, and that person is not here. We have waited for him, but he tarries over-long. General Williams acted with his eyes open—deliberately braving me. He knew the conditions were a life for a life. He allowed personal considerations to outweigh duty, knowing, and intending to pay the pen-

alty. That penalty must be paid. I cannot go back upon my word beyond what I have already gone in commuting his death-sentence to one of exile in his country's service. As for you, my man," turning to Saunders, "your request is of a different nature. Have you no home ties? Are you a single man?"

To my surprise, Saunders hesitated and shifted uneasily from one foot to another.

"Come, I asked you a question; answer it," insisted the protector, somewhat sharply. "Have you a wife?"

"Yes, your Highness; quite a recent one, though," stammered poor Saunders, blushing like a girl through his clear skin.

"Recent or no, you are married, my man, at any rate," retorted Cromwell with a grim smile. "Your wife has a claim on you."

"Yes, sir; I know, your Highness, but my master's claim is the oldest," said the soldier boldly, in spite of the perspiration which had now begun to trickle down his temples.

"And so you would deliberately desert your wife to accompany your master to a far-off land from which, I fear, few of our brave fellows ever return? It sounds somewhat unnatural to me. Either your love for your master must be a passion, or else your love for your wife cannot be very deep, methinks. Perhaps you have married in haste and now repent it at leisure, and desire to bury your regret in exile?"

Saunders's boyish face worked.

"I—er—I—did marry in haste, sir," he muttered incoherently, "but I—I—er—have not repented it, as I feared I might; that is, I feared it might not be the Lord's will that I should marry her—but I think it must have been. I have no desire to—to—desert my wife, for I am very fond of her—too fond, I sometimes fear, for my growth in grace," he stumbled on miserably.

It spoke volumes for Cromwell's capacity for understanding men of this genus and entering into their feelings that he listened attentively and with quite a serious face to the good fellow's confused utterances.

"I think I catch your meaning," he said at length. "You fear you may have acted without duly inquiring of the Lord for guidance in this matter. We all of us are prone to similar error, but God is merciful, even as a father, and often overrules our petulant self-will and gives us blessings unasked. As touching this question of your going abroad, however, now that you have undertaken this new responsibility, I cannot think you have the right to act as you might, had you been a free agent. Your duty is at present to remain with your wife."

"He can still do that, your Highness, and yet follow his master," calmly interposed a clear treble voice from behind us, "if your Highness will give his wife permission to accompany him to Jamaica."

Cromwell and all of us turned amazed faces upon the new speaker.

"You are Lady Killigew's maid," exclaimed the protector. "Am I to understand that you are also this man's wife?"

"Yes, your Highness; we were married last week."

"Small wonder he did not pause to inquire of the Lord!" ejaculated Cromwell, with a laugh, and with that curious irreverence which sometimes characterized his remarks.

He gazed at the pretty creature with frank and kindly admiration.

"As to your accompanying your husband to the West Indies, that is totally out of the question," he said. "It is no climate for women."

"But I am partly Irish, your Highness."

"Well, what of that?" inquired the protector, knitting his brows with a slightly puzzled air. "Is the climate of Jamaica more suitable for the Irish?"

"I do not know, your Highness, but I thought it might be, as I have been told your Highness is sending out there a thousand Irish girls."

I caught in my breath, and there fell an ominous hush over the room. For a moment Oliver bent his terrible stare upon the daring speaker, but that minx met it with roguish Irish gray eyes and dimpling cheeks—all saying as plainly as possible:

"Ah! I had you that time, your noble Highness. Now, how are you going to deal with me?"

And his noble Highness dealt with her with his usual unexpectedness.

Throwing himself back in his chair, he gave vent to a great laugh which rang out loudly and genuinely through the petrified silence.

"Upon my word," he declared, "you deserve to be put in the stocks for your impudence; and yet I like your courage. Let me tell you, however, that those women, Irish or Scotch or whatever they be, who are sent out to the Indies are women of loose and light conduct, whose riddance is of benefit to this realm."

The pretty Privet essayed to look crestfallen, and hung her head shyly.

"What a pity, your Highness," she murmured softly, "as they are sent out to people these new lands, that there should be no virtuous women among them to raise up a godly and manly race to the glory of our nation."

Cromwell brought his hand down heavily upon the table.

"I declare," he said, "if there were more of your character, mistress, such a race would be nurtured there that no Spaniard would ever again dare to put foot on the shores of that land, far away though it be from the mother country and her help and protection. If you wish to go, go; and may the Almighty bless you and make you as a fruitful vine."

I could not suppress a little stab of jealousy within me as I caught the look of triumph which the wilful Privet shot at her great, confused, shamefaced husband. She had got her own way and succeeded in

getting his request granted also, and she was enjoying her triumph.

I deliberately reined in my glance so that it did not extend to that spot where stood my lady by the side of her mother. Unbidden, the thought arose: *my* wife had not asked to be allowed to accompany me. Angrily I chided myself for entertaining the idea even for a second. I could not picture my lady in such a setting: a land of blasting heat, racking fever, inhabited by a few savages and as many filthy, dusky Spaniards, and overrun by immense droves of wild cattle—a land of chaos already become the cemetery of thousands of Englishmen, and likely to be the grave of thousands more, for the daily death-rate among the soldiers and settlers was known to be frightful.

I could not have accepted any such sacrifice on my lady's part in any case. Why, then, should I presume to feel aggrieved even for a moment because she had not acted as Saunders' scatter-brained minx of a wife had acted, and with equal lack of forethought and knowledge?

Ah! the young malapert has now slipped her hand into that viking's great palm. Good heavens! what a complexion the man has!—a court lady would pay a fortune for it.

A momentary silence had fallen over the room. Cromwell had turned to examine a file of papers placed before him by one of the officers at his side and was busy affixing his signature to one of them. I

supposed it was connected with my sentence, and with an odd fascination watched his pen performing its scrawly journey. So much absorbed was I in following the scratchy movement of the quill that I was hardly conscious of a stir at the door behind me, until an attendant passed me by and, approaching the Secretary Thurloe, stooped and whispered something in his ear.

Thurloe looked up sharply, his face strangely alert. Rising to his feet, he went behind the protector's chair and in his turn bent and whispered to him. Cromwell paused in his writing and, raising his head, threw a quick glance in the direction of the door.

"Is that so?" he ejaculated. "Let them be called in, then."

Instinctively all our eyes followed the direction of his glance, and in the expectant pause which followed a wild surmise played havoc with my composure. I was, I confess it, a prey to the most acute nervousness by the time the door opened again to admit the entrance of the two persons I had in my mind.

Lord and Lady Killigew.

In spite of the premonition I had had, I could not repress a violent start at the sight of them, and by a curious fatality I realized that the eyes of both the new-comers had in some strange way been attracted first to my person, and were fixed upon me, all unwillingly, as it seemed to me, observing my painful discomposure and being affected by it themselves.

Lord Killigew, who looked wretchedly ill and walked slowly like a sick man, averted his eyes from my face and turned them upon the forbidding figure seated at the table.

Cromwell watched his advance for a few seconds in frowning silence; then he remarked harshly:

“So you have come, Lord Killigew, at length.”

“Yes, your Highness. I deeply regret the delay, but, if I mistake not, fate has for once dealt kindly with me. I am in time, sir, I take it?”

“In time for what?” asked his Highness.

Lord Killigew smiled, slightly derisively.

“In time to be hung, your Highness.”

“Is that what you have returned for?” inquired Cromwell, without a smile.

“Well, whichever fate you have reserved for me, sir: hanging or beheading, it matters not which so long as I attain my object,” replied Killigew flippantly; but for all the outward calmness of the man his extreme bodily weakness could not be hidden.

Cromwell made a sign to one of the attendants.

“Fetch his lordship a chair; you are a sick man, my Lord.”

Killigew set his lips more firmly still.

“I have been ill, sir. That is the only cause of this unfortunate delay. I was struck down with a fever as soon as I landed in France, and, there being a fear that it was infectious, my wife was forced to have me conveyed to an out-of-the-way hovel off the main track

of travelers. There she nursed me back to life, but, as fate would have it, all our letters informing Lord Lovet of our whereabouts miscarried, and in consequence we received none of the communications from England until a week ago. Even then our voyage was delayed by the recent storms. I am grateful to heaven, however, that I am even now in time to prevent an injustice being done."

"The injustice being——?"

Lord Killigew looked steadily into Cromwell's eyes, fair and square.

"The injustice being that a brave and loyal gentleman should bear the fate intended for another, your Highness. I am here to place myself unreservedly in your hands—to confess to having taken up arms against the Commonwealth, to have lain in disguise for months, and passed as dead, to have stolen and made use of a passport for my own purposes, whereby I escaped across the sea. And to have traded upon the generosity of General Williams and unwittingly brought him into his present position in your disfavor. The only boon I crave at your hands, sir, is to be permitted to hear you, when you pronounce my sentence, pronounce also a pardon for General Williams."

Cromwell made no immediate reply. Instead, his glance wandered to the silent figure of the woman who stood by the side of the self-condemned Royalist. Then he turned toward my lady.

"Madam, will you oblige me by coming forward and standing beside your cousin?"

My lady obeyed instantly, and when the two women stood side by side I realized that, extraordinary as was the resemblance, there were little differences which might easily pass undetected when the cousins were apart from one another.

Lady Killigew was slightly the taller, her cheeks paler and a little less rounded, but these last dissimilarities could well be of recent growth, considering the anxiety and fatigue she had suffered of late.

After a moment's close observation of the two cousins Cromwell exclaimed:

"The likeness is amazing. I do not wonder now that you were entirely hoodwinked, Williams. When did you learn of the fact that your husband was alive, Lady Killigew? You recall the date, no doubt?"

"Yes, your Highness; it was the fifteenth of June."

"Lord Killigew was supposed to have met his death on March eleventh," commented Oliver thoughtfully. "It must have been within a few days, then, of receiving the proposed contract of marriage with General Williams that you learned you were not a widow?"

Lady Killigew's fair face flushed slightly.

"I think I received the communication from your Highness indicating your choice of a suitor for my hand on June eighth."

"Yes, I recall it was something about that date, and,

if I remember rightly, you expressed considerable unwillingness to accept the choice selected; so much so, indeed, that I suspected some deeper reason than the one you were pleased to give, which was that General Williams was not of the same social standing as yourself. Had you any other reason?"

"The reason I gave, sir, was, I think, sufficient," she replied, with a touch of that hauteur so familiar to me.

Cromwell had not removed his steady gaze from her face during this conversation.

He now remarked coolly:

"You are not speaking the entire truth, my Lady. You had some reason behind that, I take it. I intend to unravel this pretty affair to my satisfaction before I finish with it, and until I am satisfied I will detain you all in my custody. Now, madam, will you be pleased to tell me the whole truth? What had you against General Williams besides his birth? He has already informed me of the main facts of his early career, namely, that he was a laborer upon your father's estate at Rookherst, but left the locality about the age of seventeen, never to return save on short visits. Did you come into any contact with him during any of those visits?"

With considerable perturbation of mind I began to see where this cross-examination might lead. If the story of the blow and its sequel, the kiss and midnight escapade at Rookherst, came to light, my present position would certainly not be improved. As my

thoughts ran back over the past, all the old vehement feelings I had experienced rose up before my mind. I stared at the tall stately woman with her haughty bearing, standing within a few paces of me, with an amazed sense of incredulity that I could ever have been such a fool as to have striven and suffered for, hated and loved her so vainly, so madly, stretched out my hands to her and seemingly held her in my grasp, only to discover that she had eluded me at the last, and that I had been panting after a beautiful phantom, chasing a chimera of my own imagination.

With a queer revulsion of feeling I saw now with a clearness as never before that, even had I been able to obtain my heart's desire and had got to wife the flesh-and-blood reality, she would not have satisfied me. I should never have won her love, and I might have grown to loathe the sight of her, in the bitterness of my disappointment.

As I stood there, awaiting her reply to Cromwell's interrogation, I felt instinctively that there was not indifference but a strong personal aversion for me on her side. I had felt it before, in the tavern at Dover, to my utter confusion of mind, for I had no key to the puzzle then as I had now.

It must have been bitter indeed to the proud woman to see her idolized husband going to his death, while the man she disliked with all the energy of her passionate, wayward nature, and whom she probably connected with her misfortune, went free. She had it in her

power to do me an injury at that moment, and by a few words to cast me back into disgrace.

“I am awaiting your reply, madam. I wish to know whether you met General Williams after he left Rookherst as a young man, and, if so, how often, and in what circumstances?”

I failed to see how she would escape from this terrible inquisition, even with the best endeavor possible, but I did not know her. She faced him fearlessly.

“Your Highness, since you *will* probe old wounds, I will no longer try to avoid laying them bare. My dislike to General Williams began *before* he left Rookherst as a young man. He behaved in an unmannerly way to me one day, as I deemed it, being only a spoiled child of thirteen. I struck him with my whip in my anger, and my father, fearing he might try to revenge himself, had him deported out of the country. Years after that he came back, and, in order to exact what he considered just payment for the injury I had done him, he forced me to kiss him! I have never forgiven him that humiliation, and never shall. There! your Highness, you have the truth in a nutshell. Your intimate knowledge of human nature will inform you that there is no animosity so great as that of a vain woman who has had her self-esteem pricked. I am that woman. Can you understand, sir, now, why I showed such aversion to the choice your Highness made?”

Cromwell's stern face relaxed into a slight smile.

"I think I can, madam," he said. "I am not satisfied you have told me *all* the truth, but you have told me enough to make the matter clearer. You may be a vain woman, Lady Killigew, but I think you are a courageous one, and I fancy your experiences of late may have taught you valuable lessons. I only regret that your mistaken principles should have led you and your husband into rebellious actions against the state which have brought you to this unfortunate position.

"Lord Killigew, you will be brought to trial in the usual way in due course; until then, instead of committing you to the Tower, I give you permission, on your parole, to lodge where you choose, in view of the state of your health. You will communicate your address to the secretary of state.

"General Williams, although you have, on your own confession, failed in your duty, I propose to give you a free pardon because of the agreement there was between us that it should be either you or Lord Killigew who should bear the penalty.

"Your only punishment will be the forfeiture of your illegally acquired estate. I propose to confiscate the entire property of Rookherst and to put it up for sale, the moneys to be considered as just payment of all the expenses the state is put to on account of the restless temper of such Royalists as yourself, Lady Killigew.

"Sir Reginald Lovet, in view of the part you played in this deception, you will be fined to an amount to be

decided upon later. Captain Lovet, I should be justified in depriving you of your commission, but in consideration of your past services and gallantry in the field I intend to overlook your misdemeanor this time."

With which last words the protector rose abruptly to his feet, indicating that the inquiry was at an end.

I took a step forward and saluted.

"Well, what is it?" he demanded sharply.

"Will you give me permission, your Highness, to serve in the West Indies under General Fortescue for a year?"

"Why?"

"I have a strong desire, sir, to reëstablish your confidence in my loyalty, if I can do so," I replied.

"And may I accompany General Williams, for the same motive, sir?"

It was Captain Lovet who now spoke. Cromwell regarded us steadily for a few seconds.

"Very well, gentlemen. I accept your proposal. It is an honorable one." Then, as if suddenly recollecting something, he turned quickly toward my lady.

"In this case, though, Mistress Williams, my promise to you does not hold good. As your husband will only be going for a twelvemonth, I cannot permit you to accompany him."

My brain whirled. Had my lady, then, a previous understanding with his Highness? Had she actually

obtained permission to go into exile with me? I tried to catch her eye, but she deliberately avoided mine; as she dropped a demure courtesy to Cromwell, her lips nevertheless set rebelliously. I gathered from the way in which his usually stern mouth twitched that his Highness also noted those rebellious curves and appreciated them.

He now turned away from us and strode heavily to the door, followed by the other officers and by Thurloe, all of whom paused to shake me kindly by the hand in passing.

Save for a few subordinate officials, we were thereupon left alone in the apartment—an ill-assorted family party, each awkwardly aware of the constraint between us.

CHAPTER XVIII

A FAMILY PARTY

I WAS the first to make a move. As was natural, I walked across to Lord Killigew.

"I have to thank you, my Lord, for saving me at such cost to yourself. It was only what one would expect from one of your character, and my thanks are small repayment, I fear."

He smiled at me that whimsical smile I remembered.

"That reminds me, Williams," he said. "I have learned that there are some circumstances which are too strong for even gentlemen of honor. I fear I shall be unable to meet you now, as I proposed. Perhaps, however, we may consider ourselves quits. What say you?"

We shook hands.

"I can only earnestly hope that the protector will act mercifully," I exclaimed.

"Thanks. I believe you have all along wished me well, General; throughout my misfortunes—misfortunes, by the way, not brought upon me entirely through drink," he added, with an irrepressible grin.

The fellow, I felt convinced, would go to his death

with a smile and a joke. He became grave the next moment, however, and his eyes wandered across the room to where his wife stood conversing in an undertone with Lady Lovet and my lady. "It is on my wife's account I am troubled," he said in a lowered tone. "She has already suffered much on my account. Will you speak with her, Williams, to show her you bear no ill-will toward her?"

"That surely should require no assurance," I exclaimed. "How could I bear ill-will after what you and she have both done for me to-day?"

"Well, I should like you to speak with her, if you will. I will attract her attention. Rosamond!"

Lady Killigew looked round, and then came deliberately towards us.

Our eyes met, and I again caught that flash of resentment she could not control, even as she held out her hand. I bowed low over it, as it lay cold and passive in mine.

"You have much to forgive me, sir," she said in a low, grave voice.

"I have nothing to forgive, madam," I replied with equal gravity. "If there was any blame due, it should be upon me for my headstrong folly; I can only trust that your misfortunes have not been aggravated by any action I took."

"We all seem to have been the puppets of some freakish fortune," she said sadly. "I see now had I

acted throughout with honesty and left the issues to God, it would have been wiser, for worldly wisdom fails in the end."

I could only bow again over the white hand, for I knew she spoke the truth. It had been a hard lesson for her to learn, and we had each had to learn it.

"Can I be of any aid in finding suitable lodgings for you and Lord Killigew, madam?" I inquired, in order to change the subject to one less personal.

"Thank you, sir. My uncle, Sir Reginald, will do that. We will lodge with them for the present in the Strand. Here is my uncle, wishing to speak with you, I think."

Turning round, I found myself face to face with the baronet and his lady; my own dear lady stood aloof beside her brother, I noticed, and my heart fluttered as I wondered how we should meet at last. There seemed to be so many unavoidable hindrances to our doing so. The old baronet held out his hand, after I had bowed to his wife and kissed her delicate beringed fingers in silence.

"I shall be honored if you will shake hands with me, General Williams," began Sir Reginald. "I could not bring myself to offer you my hand before, knowing that I was not dealing fairly with you; but, now that you know all, will you clasp hands with an old man who has bitterly regretted deceiving a man of honor?"

We clasped hands warmly, and I recalled the morn-

ing I rode away from Tunhill, filled with the desire to be admitted into this man's family on equal terms.

One more pause on my way to my lady.

The steward caught my eye.

He looked so downhearted and aged that my sympathy went out to him, and I could not pass him by without a word.

"Cheer up, Masterman," I exclaimed, putting my hand on that resolute shoulder. "While there is life there is hope. Lord Killigew has many and powerful friends, and I think we have good grounds for hoping that mercy will be extended to him. He is a sick man and will not desire to mix himself up with politics again, which his Highness will realize. This war with Spain, too, will tend to quiet the many factions at home and relieve the Government of fears of insurrection for some time to come, all of which facts will improve his lordship's position and chance of a reprieve."

The faithful steward's face brightened up considerably.

"Think you so, really, sir? That is good news. I should be a happy man indeed, if I could die still serving my lord and his lady."

"No need to talk of dying yet, Masterman," said I, "unless you happen to shoot off a pistol by mischance and hit yourself. You must really be careful how you handle firearms, you know."

He permitted his grave face to relax and his eyes twinkled appreciatively.

“Yes, sir. I will follow your advice and practise at a target, sir.”

Then at last I reached my lady.

I looked into her eyes and she gave me her two hands. Low I bent my head over her fingers, so soft and warm in my clasp, but before I could press my lips to them she had withdrawn them from me, and putting her arms round my neck kissed me on the forehead.

“I have always wished to kiss your forehead, Peter,” she said, with the artlessness of a child. “It is such a nice forehead.”

What was a man to answer to that?

I said nothing, but I kissed her not on her hands, nor yet on her forehead alone, but again and again, wherever I could, until she hid her face against my shoulder with a little gasp for breath.

“And you intended going into exile with me?” I asked at length. “How did you persuade his Highness, and how did you know which choice I would make?”

“I told his Highness that he could not prevent me going except by imprisoning me, and as to the other question I have not made you my chief study all these weeks to no purpose. I knew beforehand which choice you would make.”

Two years have passed since I began to write this history of "My Lady's Bargain," and how it affected my life.

My brother-in-law and I came through our term of expiation unscathed, through God's merciful providence.

We never served under Major-General Fortescue, after all, for that gallant soldier had already died, all unknown to us, even before Cromwell spoke his name that morning in November, 1655.

His successor, Major-General Sedgwick, was a man in a thousand, a great-hearted, loyal-minded gentleman, to serve under whom was an honor and an education, and it was no small grief to us when that deeply religious soul also returned to his Maker the following June, another victim of the bad climate and the arduous endeavor men were called upon to endure in those far-away islands.

On my return to England I met Lord and Lady Killigew again, for his Highness had acted with that wise magnanimity which was a part of his complex character, and after a short imprisonment had released his lordship conditionally upon his good behavior.

Rookherst Place is still the home of my lady and myself, for Sir Reginald Lovet bought the estate when it was put up for sale, and it appeared to be the unanimous desire of all branches of the family that it

should become the possession of my lady and her humble servant Peter Williams.

I confess this generosity overwhelms me somewhat even now, and I still feel I am an interloper when my eyes rest upon that lifelike portrait of my Lady Killigew hanging in the hall. But my lady says that is rubbish, and she believes little Peter will be more sensible, which is likely, for he seemeth to be a remarkably sensible infant for his age, and has his mother's eyes.

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